

Wartime Reminiscence of Dorothy Still Danner, NC, USN
Time Period: World War II (POW)
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Bureau of Medicine and Surgery
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When did you decide you wanted to be a nurse? Was that early in your childhood?

No, indeed. It was during the depression years. I thought I wanted to be a dress designer. My mother evidently liked nursing and the fact that the LA county hospital paid the nurses a little stipend and it was for free. She took me over there and the next thing that I knew I was a student nurse. I really enjoyed it. I found nursing a very satisfying profession.

Where did you go to nursing school? Right at the hospital?

Yes, the LA County General Hospital School of Nursing.

What year was that?

It was about 1932.

Oh really. So you were just a young kid really.

Well, I was just 18. You had to be 18 to get in and I got in at the beginning of 1932.

So when you got out of nursing school, did you stay there at the hospital and work at the hospital?

No. I did private duty for a while then I got a job at the Presbyterian Hospital in Hollywood. Then, a friend of mine told me about this job out in Torrance. It was way out in the desert. It just was a little tiny hospital with 25 beds. So, I applied and was accepted out there. There was another nurse like me who had very little experience. At any event, through some political pull, they fired the two of us. I was looking through one of the American nursing journals and I saw this application for the Navy. At that time, there were only 400 nurses in the Navy. I really didn't expect to be hired but I was real surprised when I got my orders to go to San Diego Navy Hospital for a physical and the next thing I knew I was in.

That was 1937.

Yes. Late 1937. In fact, it was probably the end of 1937. So I spent '38 and '39 at San Diego before I was transferred out to the Philippines.

When you made an application at that time to become a nurse, did they give you an examination--not a physical--but some type of a written examination?

No. I really don't remember the details of it except this form was in the *American Journal of Nursing*. I filled it out and sent it in and got orders to report for a physical. So if there was any further examination it must have been oral as far as I can remember.

By the way, the Nurse Corps was a very small thing then.

Oh yes. But I think at that point they week they were beginning...I know the Army was building up with reserves and the Navy was apparently expanding...but at a slower rate and that's probably why I got in it.

So your first assignment after getting in was at San Diego?

Yes.

At the hospital?

Yes.

The Balboa Hospital?

Right. Oh, it was beautiful. This pink building sitting up on the hill, looked down over the harbor and see all the Navy ships out there and feel real important as part of Uncle Sam's Navy. I really enjoyed it. That was very nice and right next to the Balboa was the zoo and the park and so on. It was a beautiful set up.

Everyone whoever served there says the same thing and I remembered when I visited there some years ago. I remember the parking lot for the zoo is right across the road from the hospital. But you felt once you were there; this was it. You knew you had made the right decision.

I liked the tradition, the language, the Navy talk.

All of it was a novelty at that time for you. Wasn't it? In those days, of course, Navy nurses didn't have a rank. How did they address you?

Miss.

And it wasn't until the war about '43 - that they finally gave nurses rank. So you were addressed as Miss such and such. How did you address your supervisors?

Well, as miss. But, of course on our caps we had single gold stripe on a black band and our chief nurse had two on hers. We were just sort of a little family unit and we were not supposed to socialize with the enlisted personnel. We were more or less on a pro-officer rank at that point you might say. I think that kind of stuck with me throughout the war. You know, officers don't fraternize with the enlisted personnel. But I'll have to admit some of the nurses married some very fine men from the enlisted ranks.

Was there ever any point in that early period at San Diego, your first assignment, where you thought "Gee, I think I'd like to make this a career and stay in for some undetermined length." It was just in a sense a lark at the time. It was just a lot of fun. So how long were you at San Diego?

Two years. There were two-year tours of duty at that point in time.

What kind of duty did you have in the hospital at San Diego?

I don't remember working in surgery but I worked in the clinics and different wards. We nurses were clowning around on this one ward. I think it was a TB ward. One of the patients had a bosun whistle and he presented it to both she and I. I called her "Tiswiz" and she called me "Doswoz." And so we had our names engraved on it. I still have the little bosun's whistle.

You still have it after all these years. You didn't have it with you in prison. You had sent it home?

Yes.

So you were there and then in 1939 you went to Cañacao.

Yes. I went out on the *Henderson*. We left the first part of January and got there around the first of February. So it was 30-day trip.

February of '40. What kind of a ship was the *Henderson*?

It and other ships took personnel.

Transport-type ships. Do you remember what the trip over was like?

Yes. It was a fun trip. We first stopped at Honolulu. I can still see the people on the dock there with their leis and the hula dancers. Oh, it was very festive. Then we spent two or three days going around the islands. That was fun. First time I ever had frog legs.

So you went island-hopping. You didn't go directly to the Philippines. You stopped in Hawaii.

Yes. That was all.

Oh just Hawaii and then you went from Hawaii. The people you travelled with...these were nurses that you knew or you just made friends right away and they became...

Edwina Todd was on the same ship and so was Laura Cobb. That's probably why I developed such a close friendship with Edwina. Of course, Laura got off at Guam and the island was quarantined with measles at the time so none of the rest of us got off. Then we went on to Cañacao.

Did you land at Cañacao. Do you remember the day you landed?

Yes. The ship came in to the Manila Bay and it went up to pier 7 and that was where we disembarked. We took a taxi, I think, and were driven around to Cavite and to the peninsula where the Navy hospital was. We reported in at the Cavite Navy Yard. Then we were taken over to the hospital.

When you saw the hospital, you knew you were going to be there for awhile and you looked at it. What were your thoughts?

Oh, I was amazed. But the Philippines after Hawaii were not quite as spectacular. Maybe it was the time of the year but Honolulu was so colorful and green and this was kind of drab at that point. But anyway, I've become very fond of the base there. It was like being in the center of everything. The Navy Yard was just across Manila Bay. I would say that it was less than half a mile away. There was a road that ran out to the end of the peninsula at Sangley Point and across that road or the hospital border down on one side and on the other side was the radio station with three tall towers. You could see the red lights from the hospital compound after dark and, of course, there was the swimming pool and the officer's club out there at Sangley Point. It was a very social life out there with the families and so on. It was a whole different pace then what I

was used to in San Diego. There were always parties and of course the nurses got involved along with everybody else.

So it was good duty.

Yes, it was very good duty. There was sort of a saying. Wednesday we were preparing for Thursday inspection and on Friday everybody was getting ready to go on liberty and on Monday they were too tired so nothing got done except on Tuesday.

So Tuesday was the only day that anything happened because you were either recovering or recuperating or getting ready for inspection.

Something like that.

During that period when you were having such wonderful duty and having parties and participating in the social life, was anyone aware of the fact that things were not going well as far as the relations with Japan were concerned? Were you feeling any sense of being out in a pretty exposed position out there or was that something you didn't think much about?

No. Not at that point. Everybody was so social-minded but around the first of 1941 they sent the dependents home. Of course, there was a lot of gnashing of teeth, tearing of hair, and all this and all that. Personnel going home left 12 of us Navy nurses there with the whole base full of men. Of course, our social lives changed considerably at that point. Still, we heard about the rape of Nanking and all these things but nobody thought the Japs would be silly enough to try and doing anything to Uncle Sam.

So there was a sense of invulnerability because you were part of a nation that was so powerful and so respected and feared. I understand that was kind of a feeling generally that these little yellow men wouldn't dare mess with Uncle Sam.

At that point they were flooding the market with all this junk stuff - inferior kind of products. There were a lot of Japanese on the California coast and you sort of thought of them as being inferior.

They figure if they made this kind of garbage that certainly their war machine couldn't be very good either.

One of my friends gave me this little radio and it was marked "Made in USA Japan."

A little town or city they developed so they would....my parents told me about that.

But I think I liked their art that I saw in the store. But other than that, like the Filipinos, we didn't think...you know they were servile people and we didn't really appreciate what their problems were, much less the Japanese.

So when Pearl Harbor came, you were shocked as anyone else. Do you remember that day? How did you hear about Pearl Harbor?

I'm not sure I've figured out exactly what the time difference was but it was during the middle of the night that we were awakened and told that Pearl Harbor had been hit. So we were sent over to the hospital as soon as we got dressed and had our first snack of the day. Since the hospital was right in the target zone, we were ordered to send all the ambulatory patients back to duty and

the rest of them we would send over to Manila. Arrangements were made to admit them to what had been a dependence ward at the Sternberg Army Hospital.

How far away was Sternberg?

It was about 10 miles across Manila Bay from Cavite to Manila but going on ground it was about 30 miles, I guess. At any rate, at the end of the first day all the ambulatory patients were sent back to duty. On the following day, they finally had arrangements made with Sternberg and the rest of the patients were sent over with two of the nurses and a few of the doctors and corpsmen went with them. So the rest of us sat and waited until they made arrangements to move the hospital. Then on Wednesday the Navy Yard was bombed. It was wiped out. Of course, we got all the patients and they came in. The Japanese apparently left Formosa, as everybody called Taiwan then, around the same time. So by the time they got to Manila or to this area it was about noon.

Air raid signals would happen about noon and we were in our nurses' quarters at the time. On Monday, we went under the building. We had sandbagged it around. Of course, the buildings are up on stilts there mostly and we went under the building and it was over in just a matter of minutes because they weren't coming around the Navy base. In fact, on Monday they actually wiped out the Army Air Fields.

Clark, they came and they wiped out all the B-17s.

And I think Nichols Field and Nielson Field also got hit.

But they hadn't touched the Navy at that point.

No. On Tuesday, nothing particularly happened but Wednesday we really got it.

That was the 10th.

Yes. We were under the nurses' quarters at the time.

Do you remember what that was like...that experience of hearing all of this going on? All these bombs falling. Were you terrified?

As best I remember it. I was thinking these things happened. I can remember the earthquake in Long Beach when I was in training--all the commotion and how patients were brought in and prepared and all of this stuff. We were all ready to except these people and so on and I was kind of figuring on the same line. This raid lasted about an hour. You get kind of numb to this going on over your head...I didn't know exactly what to expect.

Could you hear the planes?

Yes. We could hear them roaring overhead but you drifted away mentally from all of this, at least I did. Maybe the other girls didn't I guess, looking at them, they were more scared than I was and I always felt scared because of my stupidity. But in any event, when they had finished wiping out the Navy Yard they came around and hit one of the radio towers and down it came crash bang. They went right down Sangley Point and bombed, bombed, bombed. Then, all of a sudden it was quiet like someone said the quiet after so much noise was a shock in itself. It was a loud quiet. So, we came out from under the building and there was the Navy Yard all flattened out and black smoke coming up everywhere. We rushed over to the hospital and there it was loaded. I thought we'd be over there in time to admit the patients. But patients were coming out

all over the place. They were on the floor. There were Filipino women and children and men and our own people from the Navy Yard. It was really a shocking scene. The power line to the hospital was knocked out. All we had were auxiliary lighting and they wouldn't even take the elevators up to the second floor. It was a pretty hectic afternoon. By the time we got them all sorted out and the dead taken out to the morgue and one thing or another, things began to quiet down. It was really a mess. Sanitation just wasn't there.

You probably don't remember how many patients there were but the beds were filled and there were patients on the floor and the corridors and they were everywhere. There were hundreds of them.

We're trained to triage and that was impossible. You just tried to find out which was the worst ones to go to surgery and so on. One thing I remembered was this...things began to quiet down and it must have been later in the evening and this one patient...I was going around and checking the patients and so on and making sure they were comfortable and doing the last-minute things.

By this time, they were beginning to transfer them over to Manila. This one patient...I stopped to talk to him. He called me over and he said, "Nurse, I'm dying." And so I thought he's talking through his head and I said "Oh you're going to be fine." He said, "Oh no I know I'm dying." So he told me that in surgery he heard the doctor tell the corpsmen or nurses there that there's no use trying to operate on this man because the whole part of his stomach...his intestines were exposed. So, they just put a hot blanket over his abdomen and covered him up and sent him back to the ward. And so I remember telling him, "They must have been talking to somebody else." He said, "Oh no. They were talking about me." So, I said Well, don't think that's true." And I said "I'll look and make sure and clear this situation." I pulled back the covers and here was this horrible odor and there wasn't enough skin to connect. Oh I was just sick. I asked him if he was comfortable and if there was anything he needed like a drink of water--a sip of water. Anyway, I told him I'll be right back in just a short while.

At that point you didn't tell a patient he was dying; this was not done. The doctors didn't do it or the doctors didn't even have the stomach to tell the relatives they were dying and much less the nurses. This was just not a part of our job. So I went back to making my rounds and this kept bothering me. I just felt so guilty about not being able to do something for the guy. Finally, when I got the courage to go back and ask him if there was something that he would like me to do for him, I went back there and his bed was empty. He was dead. That just really shook me and I started to cry. I went out and had myself a lot of tears and so on. When I finally came back, we went into the kitchen. Peggy [Nash] was there.

Peggy Nash?

Yes. So we went into the kitchen to have a cup of coffee and something to eat and the doctor and some of the corpsmen were in there and these two men--they were just helpers from the yard came in and what they had been doing was taking the bodies out to the morgue and so they came in and asked the doctor if they had some good booze that they could have. When the corpsmen asked them what's the matter 'are the corpses out there flying around?' They said, 'No but one of them sat up and asked for a drink of water.'

So one of them wasn't dead.

Pulse rates died. In all the confusion, pulse rates could have stopped temporarily. Either that or it wasn't noticed or it was so weak that it was not picked up. At any rate, it wasn't until around

midnight that we finally...some of the PT boats, which were new out there, came to take us over to Manila. I'm not sure of myself on this point but I'm sure we went across the lake.

Went across the bay.

Yes.

In a PT boat.

But in my story, I'm telling how we do get this monstrous boat. I had never seen one before. None of us had really. There were torpedoes on either side and I asked the ensign there, the captain of the boat, if I could stay up front. Of course, all the patients were down below and so on. Then in my story I try to give a description of what the island looked like. It's so sad and during the last week in November...perhaps earlier than that...the Navy went out on maneuvers unexpectedly. I think ADM [Thomas Hart, Commander in Chief Asiatic Fleet] got word from Washington, DC, to get out of there on the double.

This was before Pearl Harbor now.

Yes. Well, the Army had been sending out transports to reinforce MacArthur but the Navy hadn't done anything about upgrading the fleet. So MacArthur wanted Hart to keep the Navy there if anything went wrong. From Washington, DC, they told ADM Hart...you know ADM Hart was going to go along with his thinking but instead he was told to get out of there. So the Navy was already gone. All the fleet was gone except a few of the ships that were being repaired. The two submarines, the *Seadragon* and the *Sealion*, were there. The officers invited us nurses to come out for dinner on Saturday.

To the yard?

Yes. Peggy and I went.

This was before Pearl?

Yes, this was Saturday. So we just had the nicest time with those fellows. They served us dinner on the ship. That was the first time I had ever been on a submarine.

Do you remember which one it was that you were on?

The *Sealion*. So the two officers from the two submarines took us over to Manila and we went to the Jai Alai Club and different clubs.

Called the Jai Alai Club -- like the game.

And we just had the nicest time with them and "wham" the *Sealion* was gone.

That was hit on the 10th when the yard was bombed. The *Sealion* was hit badly enough and it was sunk at the dock. I remember.

But Lipes... [Wheeler Lipes] was the pharmacists mate who performed an appendectomy aboard *Seadragon* in 1942.]

That's how Lipes was assigned to the *Seadragon* because the corpsman who was on the *Seadragon* was injured. He had shrapnel or something in his arm. It wasn't serious and he

went off to the hospital, was captured, and died in captivity. Lipes took his place and then the *Seadragon* left and got out of there. And that's the only reason Lipes was on there.

I really got a wonderful coverage on that from the different things that I have read. It's quite a story how the *Pigeon* nosed in between the two ships and here it's loaded with fuel itself. He took a terrific chance that his own ship would not blow up but he got the *Seadragon* separated and towed out to where it could go under and make its way out. But the officers of both the ships were not hurt. As I recalled none of them died.

So that was the night before Pearl Harbor and of course the next day. It was early morning of the next day after that you heard about it. After the attack on Cavite... You were just describing the hospital being filled with patients. Then you went across to Manila. You took some patients with you.

Yes. We went across with our patients.

Did you have one PT boat or several?

I guess there must have been more than one.

But you took the worst of the patients to Sternberg?

No. Sternberg was swamped. They were coming in on Monday from the airfields and they had them out there on the front lawn and it was a terrific experience. They had civilian nurses come in. The civilian nurses were hired by the Army. The rest of the nurses there were called in to help out. So, the only place that was available was Estado Mayor.

Was it a hospital?

No. It was right near the hospital. The Sternberg Hospital was next to the Pasig River. It was here and over here was the Estado Mayor which was an Army base. So these regiments were being shipped out and they said that we could use one of those barracks for a temporary hospital. So they moved everything in there and it was amazing how much they managed to move over there. We were told on Monday. The chief nurse advised us to pack a bag to take with us and to pack up our stuff. So we each had one bag to carry with us but it was really amazing how much stuff they carted over there including our luggage. But that didn't get there, in fact, the next I saw of it, it was at Santa Scholastica.

O.K. So after the attack on the yard, were you at Cañacao just one day before you moved the patients over across on the PT boats?

No. On Monday, we cleared out ambulatory patients. They were sent back to duty.

Oh, to clear the hospital because you knew you were going to need the hospital at that point because something serious was going to happen to you. You knew once Pearl Harbor was hit, it was just a matter of time before they started working on you guys. So you wanted the hospital as clear as you could get it.

Yes.

Monday they hit Clark and Nichols Fields and they pretty much destroyed everything there. Tuesday nothing happened.

Tuesday we sent the other patients to Sternberg to the empty dependents ward at Sternberg.

These were not ambulatory patients. These were ones that needed further care.

Yes. So when they were gone our hospital was empty.

Until Wednesday. Then the big attack came on Wednesday when they leveled the Navy Yard. And that's when you just described the patient that you had seen. That was all Wednesday.

Yes.

When you sat down and you had tea or coffee with Peggy Nash, it was the following day that you went across or was it the same day that you took the patients--the worst of the patients over?

No. When I was talking about that patient we were still in a ward there in Cañacao.

That was still Wednesday at Cañacao.

We took our patients over to Estado Mayor which was an Army base or infantry base.

That was in Manila.

Yes.

O.K. Was that the next day? Was that Thursday?

We took them over there as they left Cañacao. We started evacuating the patients...

Wednesday night?

On Wednesday yeah...as soon as the patients were ready and as soon as they got transportation going...

And the transportation was mostly PT boats?

Yes.

Did they take them around the long way, too?

I'm not too sure about this but it seems to me like the roads were too bombed out to get passage through there.

So you had to go by boat.

I'm not too sure on that point.

So you accompanied patients across to this little Army base that you used. Then did you go back to Cañacao?

No.

You had packed your belongings at least enough to get by...your toothbrush or whatever...

Yes.

And you went with this draft of patients and that's when you ended up in Santa Scholastica.

No, this was on the 10th. So while we were in a mess there in this barracks building trying to take care of our patients, the captain was out looking for some place that could be confiscated for the use of the hospital. They found something up in Balintawak, which was north of Manila. In the meantime, they decided to set up these surgical teams throughout the city. So, they were joint efforts between the Army and the Navy Medical Corps. So they set up one there at Santa Scholastica. They set up one at the Holy Ghost College. Another one at the Philippine Union College or something like that. And the one at Jai Alai. I was with the group that was assigned to Jai Alai.

It was Susie Pitcher and Edwina Todd and I and there were no Army nurses there but there were a couple of Army doctors and corpsmen along with ours. The object was that anyone that was hit--civilian or otherwise--could come into these emergency centers. Then after they got their initial treatment, the Army patients would be sent to Sternberg and the Navy patients would go to Balintawak and the civilians would go to different civilian hospitals.

The Jai Alai building was right almost in the center of the city. From the top floor, you could see over into the harbor and so on. The Jai Alai building, incidentally, was four stories high. The first floor had the Jai Alai court and then the second and third levels were balconies overlooking the court and on the top one was the dining area. They had a dance floor up there and you looked down over the balcony at the players.

So, we set up a little receiving station there near the front of the building and there we sat. We didn't get any patients and here all this bombing is going on. The building was pretty well insulated but boy when the bombs came, the sirens... it just echoed throughout that huge open building.

This would have been after the 10th. The Japanese just kept bombing after the 10th didn't they? They didn't just suddenly bomb the Navy Yard on the 10th and that was it. They continued to do this.

Oh, right. They were bombing the Pasig River and not the city itself. But like the Pandacan District up the Pasig River, there was a Shell oil refinery and they would send down these barges with fuel. So the Japs were dropping bombs this. Anyway, it was very nerve-wracking to just sit there and not do anything.

So what was happening to the casualties from all that bombing that was going on?

I don't know. But we put out big signs.

But nothing happened. How long did that go on?

I think we were there for a couple of weeks and finally MacArthur declared Manila an open city. I guess it was after Christmas that he declared it an open city.¹

I think so.

Finally, we were told to move over to Santa Scholastica and so we packed up all this stuff. We had beds in the court. You can imagine all of the racket of putting these metal beds together, taking them apart, them echoing. Oh, it was a mess.

¹ On December 26, 1941, General Douglas MacArthur declared Manila an open city to protect the capital of the Philippines from Japanese invasion and prevent further destruction.

**What kind of medical equipment did you have to work with there at the Jai Alai building?
Did you have a fairly nice collection of instruments?**

Yes.

And you had some surgeons?

Yes.

You could have done major surgery if you had to there.

I imagine we could. I think the idea was to just give immediate attention then get the patients over to their respective hospitals as quick as possible. At any rate, we were taken down to Santa Scholastica which was in a district farther down. When we were going down, we could see the ammunition dump there in the Navy Yard which, fortunately, wasn't hit to begin with. I expect the Japs knew it was there. They probably didn't want to hit it because after all it had a whole lot of ammunition they could use. Anyway, that was blown up and the whole thing just went up in a terrific cloud of smoke.

You saw it happen?

Well, you could feel the vibration of the thing. Its soundwaves hit the...

Hit the...Let's see this is after Christmas now or around Christmas when this is happening. Were you all starting to wonder where the reinforcements were? When was someone going to come and help you guys out? I know that some of the other people later on were starting to wonder when are they going to come and get us out of here or when are they going to reinforce you? Did you start to have those feelings?

I don't remember that but I know we were beginning to think we were forgotten there at the Jai Alai. But at any rate, Santa Scholastica was very pretty little place. It was converted into a hospital beautifully and the Army had already done this. It was an Army satellite hospital actually and so while the Navy was going in, the Army was going out, one of our nurses went out with them.

I think I know who that is. Would it be nurse [Ann] Bernatitus?

Yes.

What were the circumstances of her going with the Army at that point?

There was a Navy surgical team working with the Army there and the doctors and the corpsmen on that team all went out. Of course, some of the girls were saying, 'Well she knew very well we were supposed to stay here. She should be court martialed and all this kind of stuff.

Oh, because she went with them when they felt she should have stayed with the Navy, she decided to go. In your own view, do you think it was just a matter of she was working with that surgical team and they moved out so she went with them. She wasn't violating orders or anything was she?

Well, that's what the general talk was about. I don't remember being pressed one way or the other on that.

Were there any navy nurses left at Cañacao at this point? Or had they been scattered now?

Oh, no. We all left.

All the nurses. So there were just men--the corpsmen and some doctors--left at Cañacao. Yes, they set up a little receiving station there on Sangley Point I believe.

So you worked in Santa Scholastica. Did you have any more patients there?

From the time we got there, the Navy people were orphaned. Not only our corpsmen and so on but all of the Navy personnel who were attached to the Yard and so on. So individuals picked up a rifle and joined the Army. A lot of them did...I should say...and of course...healthy young men like they were, either had died or had been too severely injured to live and they died or they were in pretty good shape. [Robert] Kentner got around on to cataloging everybody who was there.²and some of the doctors who had gone or to help Bataan or tried to get to Olongapo. You know they were lost so they came back to Santa Scholastica. Then we had more hospital personnel than we had patients. We also had the Army patients the last minute. December 31, the Army arranged to have a ship with big red crosses on it there in Manila Bay. They came and took all the Army patients on this ship down to Australia. And here we sat with that many fewer patients.

They didn't evacuate any Navy. It was just Army that was evacuated on this suddenly reconfigured hospital ship that went to Australia. So all the Navy people were left behind. What happened to the most critically injured or the ones from the Yard on the 10th? Where were they at this point?

We had a few deaths there that had survived that long, but not many.

After the bombing.

But they were either dead or well on their way to recovery.

Once they were well enough, they were returned to their units. But the units were scattered now at this point because the Yard wasn't operational anymore. So these men just went with the Army.

And then on New Year's Eve, we went up on the roof of the building.

Santa Scholastica?

Yes. And the city turned the lights on to let it be known that this was an open city. You could see over towards Pandacan. They blew up all the oil tanks over there and this cloud of smoke come over the city for days. You could see the demolition team out there blowing things up as they left.

² Pharmacists Mate Robert Kentner, a POW held in Bilibid Prison, began keeping a meticulously detailed diary while still at **Error! Main Document Only**.Cañacao, which he continued at Bilibid. During that time, he catalogued the names of those who died in captivity and other details of life at **Error! Main Document Only**.Cañacao and then at Bilibid. He buried the diary in an open space at Bilibid before liberation in February 1945. After the war, the diary was recovered and returned to the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.

They were retreating toward Bataan at this point to make a stand there. So, making it an open city, the military evacuated the city and rather than leave the ammunition behind, they destroyed what they could. But you were still there and the medical personnel were still there.

Dr. Lohman was the fleet surgeon and he was there. So was CAPT Davis and CAPT Roberts. Actually, we had a total of three captains and two commanders and six lieutenant commanders and 11 lieutenants and 3 junior grade lieutenants.

They were all left at Cañacao holding down the fort. [Thomas} Hayes was in there too wasn't he?

No. Hayes was out. He had gone out with the Marines to Corregidor.

Did you ever work with him at Cañacao?

No, I don't remember him. He was in the surgery and he hadn't been there very long.

You were a ward nurse. You weren't an OR nurse so you hadn't really assisted in surgery or anything like that.

And I was working on a medical ward at the time.

So you hadn't worked with people like Carey Smith...you knew them but you hadn't worked with them.

Yes. I knew them but I hadn't worked with them on the wards.

So the city was declared open and the lights went on and then what happened?

On 2 January, the Japanese came in and we could hear over the stadium...the Rizal Stadium was not too far away and that was where they kept the Japanese imprisoned.

Oh, whatever Japanese the Americans had captured had been taken there?

All the Japanese in the city were all taken to the Rizal Stadium.

Japanese civilians who were in the city were taken to the city so that you could keep an eye on them?

Yes. And so we could hear them "banzai-ing" and so on.

Your blood must have run cold at that point.

Well, we didn't know what to expect.

But you heard about what they did in Nanking.

Yes, but we kind of kept our fingers crossed on that. But those were Chinese. They wouldn't treat us like that. At least that's what we told ourselves.

So what was your first encounter with the enemy?

They came in the city on the 2 January but they didn't come over to Santa Scholastica until a few days later. But then a couple of the officers came in and wanted to talk to the Captain and they wanted the safe opened and they left. There were guards outside, but in the meantime, our chief nurse had some uniforms made. White uniforms were a little ridiculous at this point. So we had

these uniforms that were sort of a button coat-type. Anyway, the Captain wanted everybody to dress in white and act as usual. You know, just take care of our patients. So when the Japanese came in, everybody was in white and so on. Then finally they started coming and more often than not, we were under the non-commissioned Japs.

So the officers weren't coming to the hospital. They were sending their NCOs to deal with the people in the hospital.

Yes. But they started snooping around and looking in the cupboards and the galley and on were helping themselves.

Were they acting hostile at this point?

No.

Or they were just coming in as if they owned the place?

Yes. The officers did come in every once and awhile but mostly it was just the guards themselves. But then they started taking away the quinine from the pharmacy.

I assume you didn't make them sign for it.

Then they took our beds and the mattresses and one thing and another. Kentner for one, they wanted to see his journal, the log he was keeping.

Is this at Santa Scholastica?

Yes.

Kentner was with you at Santa Scholastica?

Yes. Anyway, they would go over it and suddenly the guard would get very upset about something or another and he'd get up and slap Kentner and Kentner would jump up at attention.

You saw this happen?

Well, not really but I knew about it.

All right. So Kentner was keeping the journal and the guy would start slapping him around. Was it because he was keeping the journal?

No. Evidently, he didn't like what he was reading. Anyway, then they would go back to this again. Again he'd blow up and Kentner would get it again. This was the kind of thing that began to happen to the other officers. But, they ignored us --the nurses. We had our own little living quarters in the dormitories there. The doctors were in the other dormitories and the enlisted men in another area.

And, of course, the classrooms were turned into wards but as time went by, they started taking one group of patients with doctors and corpsmen over to Pasay Elementary School. They were supposedly going to another hospital and then one day they brought back one of the men that was over there. He had been injured playing basketball. He said it was no hospital at all. The men were just sleeping on the ground. There were no beds. Here they had been taking out beds and mattresses and hospital pajamas and the whole works.

So they took your medicine. They took your beds. So here at Santa Scholastica, the place was being stripped...being cannibalized...so after a while you probably didn't have what to work with...

No it didn't get to that point. Actually, our patients weren't that sick. They were just putting on a front more than anything else.

When they came into the city, they knew right where all the civilians lived in the city. So immediately they went to these people and told them to take enough for three days. They were going to be registered. So they took them to three different locations in the city.

These weren't Filipinos these were...

Americans. Allied civilians...

In other words, English, Dutch, whatever.

So three days passing. By then they had herded them all in to the University of Santo Tomas.

That's where those photographs you show where their just kind of milling around with their baggage.

Yes. Well of course that was much later. But, they just dumped them in there. After three days they were still there. There was no taking them back.

The Japanese just around the city rounding them up?

To their apartments or wherever.

How did they know where they were?

Well, just as with Pearl Harbor. I don't how they knew it but of course they had a lot of Japanese spies around the city that were collecting all of this data.

So they rounded them up and they had them there for three days at Santo Tomas living in an open field? Or where were they?

Well at the University. I think there were some 66 classrooms in the main old building. So they just went around...you know...they sat in the corner here or there or their families or children or so on. The only toilet facilities were those that you'd find in the ordinary university with so many stalls. And this was not adequate for that many people. It was just a mess. Of course, sickness began almost overnight with the sanitation, the trash, and the uneaten food, and all this sort of stuff. It was just one terrific mess.

So finally the Japs came in and they wanted to know who their leader was and they didn't have a leader. But before the war, they had businessmen. They had kind of anticipated something might happen. Of course, the Army was rather expecting this, too. So this one fellow had been very active in that program and so his friend...this man...he might be...at any rate...he was appointed to be the leader. So, they formed an administration committee.

It was really remarkable what these people accomplished in a very short time. Before the week was out, they had a school, classes for the children. The children were so restless and so on. Entertainers played at the Jai Alai. One, in particular, put on shows and then another group had this newsletter they'd put out every week in which they told the people what was happening. And they put it in a light sense to make it funny as amusing as possible and it would still be informative.

Had you gotten a chance to see this yourself?

No. This was before we arrived. But the big problem was sickness and all the food spoilage and the flies.

This was January of '42?

Yes.

So you were still at Santa Scholastica. You hadn't shown up at Santo Tomas yet. When did the Japanese move you out of there?

It was on March the 8th. In the meantime, the doctors were trying to get more help over there. The civilian nurses were knocking themselves out. They had civilian doctors there so they were talking about having the Navy nurses go over there and the Captain was trying to talk them into making Santa Scholastica a hospital where they could run it, you know. But Kusamoto had us sent over there.

To Santo Tomas. Do you remember what kind of man Kusamoto was?

He was a tall fellow. He seemed very polite.

He spoke English?

I don't know. I didn't have any personal contact with him.

You didn't really have any direct relationship with any of the Japanese guards or anything like that.

Only the one who came up and said, "Ohio" and I asked him if he was from Ohio.

What did he say? He just showed up one day?

I was hanging my laundry on something outside there and he came by and he said, "Ohio." He was being polite...just saying hello. He must have thought I was a nut.

So in March you move to Santo Tomas. What did you find when you got there? Things were pretty terrible?

No. It was still a mess. They had a little hospital set up in what had been a mechanical engineering building and some of this equipment was permanently installed. They didn't have any real beds though. So the patients came in with their own beds. And they had a clinic going. So, of course, when we came over there, we were put to work. It took a little adjusting but the way that the civilians had organized themselves was quite amazing.

There were entire families?

Yes. So, they did arrange to have some of the children taken out to...I don't know whether it was a hospital or whether it was a place run by the sisters or something...where they could be taken care of, away from all of this. I think some of the mothers went out with them also.

What were you able to accomplish there at Santo Tomas? Did you set up a hospital there then?

Oh, no. Everybody was supposed to have between 2 to 4 hours of work. That may seem kind of short but by the time you stood in line that long to get something to eat.

Where did the food come from? What kind of food was available?

Through Red Cross funds. They weren't going to feed us. So that's why the Filipinos were throwing things over the fence. There were those who had servants and the servants would bring them cooked food in these little containers. And we'd see everything from mattresses to bedsteads to the whole bit going over the fence. But by the time we got there, the commandant thought that was kind of like serving monkeys at the zoo.

The commandant being the Japanese commandant at this point.

Yes. But by then they had a surly fence in front of the campus. It was an open fence. The rest of the compound had a wall around it but this had an open fence with a grill-type fence and they had put surly inside of that. This was made out of woven bamboo so that the internees couldn't see the Filipinos. In fact, that's when they started this package line. Right at the front gate they had some tables set out there. And the Filipinos would line up sidewalk and bring their packages down and pick up laundry or whatever was going out. They would set them on the table and the Japs would look through the packages and . . . It was pretty well organized.

The photograph of Peggy Nash working in the hospital holding a basin, was that at Santo Tomas?

Yes.

So you had some kind of little hospital with water.

Yes. It was in this engineering building.

Things were pretty grim in there.

Well, yes. By the time we got there, they had revamped the rest rooms. Where there were probably tables, mirrors, and what not in the women's room, they had put a pipe in across that area and put shower heads along the line and had only cold water of course. And when I went in there, here it's wall to wall women standing underneath those things taking a shower. Some of them were still wearing their underwear and others, the heck with it.

The tub... Is that where that was set up where you were washing your hair?

No. I guess they were having problems with women's hair coming down the drains and plugging up the lines, they had this bathtub set outside and they had a pipe going across the top of that with a couple of shower heads and that's where the women went to wash their hair.

Then they had the trough outside...quite a long trough where they had the pipe over it and spouts on that and that's where you either washed your laundry or took your dishes and washed them off. But in the rooms themselves, they had wires strung across the rooms so that mosquito nets and these various sized beds - either boards on blocks or twin sized beds or full sized beds or double deckers. On these lines across there, they tied their mosquito nets. Each person had about 22 square feet per person.

So underneath their beds were tin cans and other garbage. It was a mess. But of course, when we went over, we had the regular Navy field-type beds with the mattresses and the bars for the mosquito nets. So, they opened up this one corner room because they didn't expect us. So,

they cleaned out this one room and our 12 beds were put over in the corner. And the outside of the building...it was in a corner room. And so our beds were very neatly spaced.

You say 12 beds?

Yes. By this time we had the little Filipino nurse.

Oh.

Her husband was a Navy officer there at Santa Scholastica and we claimed her.

So you lost Bernatitus and you picked up this young Filipino nurse.

Yes, so there was still 12 again.

What types of things were the 12 of you doing at this time? You were taking care of patients but you didn't have any medicine or was there still medicine?

The doctors brought in medicine from their offices and so on. A lot of those people like lab technicians, pharmacists apparently had some of their own means of bringing drugs in. Then of course through the Red Cross funds. But going beyond this, by the time Bataan fell, and we heard about this, of course. Then when Corregidor fell, the Army nurses out there were finally brought into Santo Tomas. They were sent over to the building next to the compound. There was a dormitory, Santa Catalina Dormitory, and they were isolated there for awhile.

Eventually, they became part of the unit. One of the girls was a classmate of mine from the LA County General Hospital School of Nursing. When they came back in, they were put into the engineering building. The camp rented the dormitory with Red Cross funds...for a hospital. So, we had a lot more hospital space, and the nurses moved into what formerly was the hospital.

There were some 65 or 70 of them. But anyway, the Army captain took over running the hospital and Miss [Laura] Cobb had been running the other one.³ Of course a lot of things happened there. In my manuscript, I get to tell what had happened to the nurses on Bataan and Corregidor.⁴ Eventually it became so crowded. They kept bringing people in and the Japs wanted to move the camp out of Manila. So, they tried to select a site, and finally settled on Los Baños.

How did Santo Tomas look? Could you give me some more details?

I think it would be of interest to say that politics in the internment camp was something else. The first fellows that were in the executive committee ran a nice program. And then people began to say, 'Well, they're not elected. They just set themselves up there.' You know, jealousy of course comes. So, they wanted an election and so this came about. The commandant gave permission to have the election.

The Japanese commandant gave permission to have an election in camp?

Yes. And the first time around, they said they'd let it happen. They got all their campaigning and so on. Then the commandant said no. He wanted the committee to remain as it was.

³ Laura Cobb was the chief Navy nurse among the other interned Navy nurses

⁴ Dorothy Still Danner eventually published a book, *What a Way to Spend a War: Navy Nurse POWs in the Philippines*. U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1995.

This was after the election had taken place. He just disallowed it?

Yes.

So the people who were running the camp continued to run it.

Yes. So that made everybody mad at them that it was a set up job. Eventually, there was a change of commandants and there were many changes. They had an election and the new committee was in place. Hardly had they taken over before they started changing all the rules and it became an autocratic-type of executive committee.

How many people were on this committee?

I think there were about 5 or 6 plus the chairman. But the whole thing began to deteriorate. Then there was Fort San Diego [near the mouth of the Pasig River].

That was another camp?

No. Fort San Diego is in Manila right next to the Pasig River as it opens into the bay. It was used as a prison by the Spaniards when it was first built. The prisoners were put down in the bottom and as the tide came in, they were washed out. The Japanese used this for the same type of torture chamber but not washing them out. The editor of the *Manila Tribune* was taken down there and really tortured. That was our first indication of what happened outside. He came back and his hair was white and it had shrunken down to nothing and he couldn't speak.

He had been taken out of Santo Tomas by the Japanese and moved to Fort San Diego, tortured, and then was brought back. Was he to make an object lesson? Is that why they did this to him?

I don't know. That possibly could be.

But it had an effect on you all when you saw him return.

Yes, this was only one of many incidents that happened. Groups...families that had gone back into the hills, they couldn't survive that way. And they were picked up or they voluntarily came back to Manila and they were oftentimes taken down to Fort San Diego and maybe not tortured as this man was. Anyway, Fort San Diego had a name for itself and it was something that nobody liked to talk about.

But at any event, there was a lot of hanky panky going on among the internees. There was this one fellow who set up his bed, when they came in, on the landing between the 3rd floor and the roof. It was a landing that was not used very often. This was not exactly permissible but he made such a fuss about it that they said, 'Oh the heck with him. He's not hurting anybody.' And they let it go with that. But, it was discovered that he was renting his bed space, that was a little more than the camp could handle.

It was real hanky panky going on.

Oh yeah. The men and women were in separate rooms. They didn't want them to even so much as hold hands or touch each other physically in any way. So, when the committee told him that he would have to come down to one of the other rooms below, he said he didn't want to do that. And they told him to either do it or they would move him physically. So he said if they moved him down there, he'd give the commandant an earful. So, they did move him down and he went

to the commandant and told him that he was an enlisted man and that he knew that there were a lot of other enlisted men in there.

Who were presumably posing as civilians. Was that the implication?

Yes, and he could name them. So immediately the order came on the loud speakers that all military men were to report right now. So a lot of them had been picked up. They gave their rank, their rates, or whatever and it was never questioned.

So they put them in with the civilian internees.

Yes. They were picked up in Manila.

They had made no attempt to hide the fact that they were military and yet they were thrown in with the other civilians.

Yes. So, apparently this was overlooked. But this is a point that I capitalized on in my story was that I knew these men. At any event, by the time they decided to move to expand the camp farther out down into Los Baños, they asked for volunteers. They wanted 800 men to go down there to set up the camp. So two doctors that were going down asked our chief nurse if we would go down and help them set up the little hospital. So right at the last minute, we learned of this and it was just a mad house getting all of our stuff put together.

You all wanted to go? Did you feel it was a way out of that place? Or you felt it was just something to do?

It was kind of a shock when we were asked but Miss Cobb thought it would be a very good idea and we did too, after all, the Army had taken over. There was still that conflict between Army-Navy nurses.

I want to go back to something you just said. I'm intrigued with this whole idea of having a government set up in the camps. And again these internees were men, women, and children, not only Americans, but other nationalities--Dutch and British presumably--all living together in this camp. There was a routine that you mentioned. You all worked in the small hospital caring for patients. You said people were generally healthy. You didn't have any large outbreaks of disease at that point. Right?

It was mostly dysentery and diarrhea from food poisoning or maybe this sort of thing. But I might point out that the government had a committee for this and a committee for that. They had committees and subcommittees.

This is the camp government that the Japanese allowed you to have?

Yes. Each room had monitors. And the monitors met and they discussed their problems and they had the education, entertainment, gardens, and labor committees, the whole bit. It was really a regular American community.

But as you said there were these little intrigues going on - men and women sneaking into each other's rooms as you said, that kind of thing. The Dutch fellow who had his bed on the landing was entertaining young ladies at all hours.

He was renting his bed.

He was just renting it for that type of activity.

Yes.

Getting money for it. What kind of money was being exchanged?

Well, they had Mickey Mouse Jap currency which had no backing behind it all. American money and Filipino pesos and dollars backed by the American treasury were not acceptable as a medium of exchange.

The Japanese introduced their own currency?

Yes.

It was a peso but it was based...

Yes. They made pesos and santos and this sort of thing but santos, of course, were on paper.

Did the Japanese introduce the currency and were you paid? I guess what I'm saying is with the prisoners at Bilibid--the military prisons. . . Because the Japanese were not signatories to the Geneva Accords, they didn't feel obligated to pay prisoners. According to the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war were to be paid for their labor. Obviously, they weren't paid very much. But they were to be paid for their labor. And at first the Japanese did this. They would pay prisoners. If they took them out on work details they would give them little pittance. They could save the money to buy things from the commissary or whatever. Were the same type of arrangements done in the camp?

No. There were quite a number of wealthy people out there. They really profited financially by going out there and developing different businesses before the war.

Before the war?

Yes. Americans went to the Philippines, particularly during the depression years. They would teach in the colleges and help the Philippine government develop. The Philippines was a commonwealth at this point and it would have its independence in 1946. And so there were a lot of people involved with that. Then there were banks--both English and American type. But, there were businesses of many different kinds--shipping and imports and exports.

So when these civilians were interned in the camps, they brought currency with them?

They could exchange their own money for this phony money.

O.K. Play money or whatever. What could you buy with the play money?

They had canteens. The Japanese set up a little coffee shop within the camp. Different internees had licenses for their little business they operated. Some of them made candy for sale. There was a shoe repair shop, hairdressers, a seamstress.

So it was a little working community in the camp.

Yes. It was kind of strange to look at it.

So the money was just exchanged within the community. It wasn't much influx from money outside.

Well, those who had the credit to buy money could do that. You know like an IBM employee could make contact or somebody that definitely had a backing outside. So the well-to-do, these were the "haves," the internees whose servants brought them food, and then there were the "have nots."

So the Japanese did not confiscate their wealth on the outside.

No.

So the money was exchanged in the camp. Were people ever taken away for work details by the Japanese?

Only related to the camp--going out to bring something for the camp. They had the camp buyer.

Military camps and this particular intern camps were handled totally differently. I guess the Japanese were probably thinking in terms of public opinion. They didn't want show that they were abusing civilians.

Well, Santo Tomas was kind of an example. The Swiss delegates and so on were shown Santo Tomas, not the POW camps or neither the other civilian camps. There was one in Baguio and further out. There was a civilian camp down in Davao.

So this was a model. Santo Tomas was a model they'd take people to.

I think the Japanese were amazed at how well the Americans put the camp together.

So it was for their benefit to appear the worthy captors because they were treating their prisoners well.

But you're talking about an occupation army that was not really military. They were business men from Japan. The commandants were "Mr. So and So" and "Mr. So and So."

The commandants of your camp weren't members of the imperial Japanese Army then.
Right.

What about the guards?

They were not like the guards in the POW camps. In fact, they would be out there playing with the kids. They seem to have a liking for children. They would play ball with them. In fact, some of the would take the youngsters out and buy them candies and ice cream and what not. They bowed to one another but the internees were not asked to bow to them. But, sometimes the kids would run out ahead of two of the guards as they came down the road and they'd go in front of them a bow. The Japs would stop and click their heels and bow back and the children would go on. And more of them would get together and they would run on ahead of them. They were very patient with the children.

While you were in Santo Tomas, did anyone try to escape from the camp?

Yes. Before we got there, English merchant sailors went over the wall. Of course, the westerners were easily identified as not being Filipino and they were captured and brought back in and tortured. The internees could hear them being beaten in one of the front office rooms there in Santo Tomas.

Eventually, the Japanese took them out and made the men dig a common grave for the three of them. The commandant took the chairman of the executive committee and the doctor and a couple of other internees and went out to the cemetery. And when they shot the men, they shoved them in and covered them up. Of course, word came back that they weren't even dead yet. They were still groaning. But, in any event, the Japanese were very respectful about the dead. So, when they were buried, they put flowers on the graves and so on.

Was this done in the camp. They were taken out of the camp and shot?

Yes. At a cemetery.

So the word came back.

Well, there again gossip and rumors were what people lived on. And it could be that someone said, "Well, probably, they weren't even dead yet."

But the fact was that they were shot. There was no doubt about that.

Yes. They were shot and buried.

Do you remember how you had communications with the outside? Did you know how the war was going at all?

Only what we saw in the *Manila Tribune*. They brought papers in so that each room had either one or two copies of the newspaper. Of course, anything that was said meant the Americans were losing with obviously propaganda. But it really wasn't. They were very truthful about their reporting. But, of course, they were reporting what was fed into them.

These were Filipinos who were collaborators?

No. No. The Japanese had taken over the newspaper.

O.K. It was the Japanese producing an English language newspaper for the camps and so it was mostly propaganda.

Yes. But they were very truthful about what they were writing of what was told to them. Of course, the propaganda came from outside not inside. So what they learned was not necessarily the facts. Like with the [Battle of the] Coral Sea, it showed the USS *Lexington* going down and then they'd taken a picture of the *Lexington* from the bow end and then they took another picture from the stern end. Then they called one of them the *Lexington* and the other one the *Saratoga* as if they were both going down. But the sharp-eyed internees recognized that it was the same boat. Anyway, it was little deceptive things like this. At least we knew where things were going on if not from a distorted point of view.

But you all recognized that what you were getting was a rather one-sided propaganda-type thing.

Yes.

When you got the word that they were setting up a new camp at Los Baños and that was south of Manila.

Yes. I'd say about 60 or 70 kilometers south.

Do you remember when that was?

It was in May of 1943.

Miss Cobb said it was good idea and you all agreed. That's where I changed the subject, but I want to get you back on that subject again. So all the girls agreed that it was a good idea to get out of there and to go south. What was the reason?

We were needed. We weren't needed at Santo Tomas any longer with the Army nurses. There was just too many of us.

When did the Army nurses come to Santo Tomas? Were you already there when the Army nurses showed up?

Oh yes...when Corregidor fell.

That would have been May '42.

But they remained out there on Corregidor for weeks taking care their patients there. They had opened up the hospital up above and they helped with the patients up there.

Where is that?

On Corregidor. They were in the tunnel.

Oh, they were in the Malinta Tunnel. So when Corregidor fell, they worked up topside.

That was where the hospital was to begin with. Anyway, they finally sent them over to Santo Tomas in July. And they were put in the Santa Catalina dormitory which was on the other side of the street next to the campus.

This is now Santo Tomas.

Yes. They opened up the gate on that side and put a board fence there with a barbed wire on top that opened Santa Catalina to the internment camp. The Army nurses stayed there for about two months in isolation.

They weren't allowed into the main camp.

No. But it was good. They had been through so much and they really needed a rest.

Did you all get together at some point?

Yes. Then the hospital inside of the engineering building was not nearly adequate for the cases that came in. So with the camp funds, the Santa Catalina building was rented. And they brought the Army nurses in and took the patients out of the engineering building and put them in the Santa Catalina dormitory. The Army nurses went into the engineering building. Later, they needed more isolation units as tuberculosis cases developed and one thing or another. So, the Army nurses were brought into the main building. They had two separate classrooms I guess for them all. And they went on strike or were threatening to go on strike. My friend told me about this.

The Army nurses threatened to go on strike?

Yes. I was the last person to know anything so I mentioned to the chief nurse and to the girls, and immediately Miss Cobb had herself a little fit. "They can't do that to our patients!"

So, the morning the strike was suppose to take off, the Navy nurses would go over to take over. Anyway, the whole thing was kind of a funny sort of a set up. But, the Army nurses moved in. There were some real nice Army nurses and there were others that were stinkers you know just like within our own group or any group of women or people I should say.

Was there ever a time when the Army nurses and the Navy nurses worked together?

Yes. We worked on the wards with them but we never really got too close to them. There's still that old Army-Navy rivalry.

Rivalry. Getting back now. You all decided that you wanted to go down to Los Baños. Miss Cobb thought it was a good idea and you all thought it was a good idea. How did you prepare? How did you get the word? What did you do then?

Actually, when this idea came up that they were going to send them down there, they only gave them 4 or 5 days and immediately there were not nearly enough men who volunteered. But before long, they had to select names of men that were unmarried or whose wives were not there, men nobody depended on. Then some of the married men without children were even brought and they were promised that they could get married down there which was a whole kind of switch.

Who were they to marry?

Well the next group that would be transferred down would be the wives and the girlfriends of the men down there. So the day before this was supposed to come off, we were asked if we wanted to go. So, you see, it was a last minute.

So this was a volunteer thing now. The Japanese said they were opening this camp and they needed volunteers to man the camp and to go to the camp and so people just volunteered.

Except they didn't. Only a few of them did and then they didn't think maybe they wanted to go after all.

They didn't get enough volunteers, they decided to draft them more or less to go.
Right.

And the promise was that if they were unmarried and had girlfriends in the camps, they would ship the girlfriends later and then they could marry in the camp in the summer at Los Baños.

Yes. And the husbands and wives could live together down there.

Oh, they weren't allowed to live as families at Santo Tomas. Everyone was segregated. The wives were segregated from the husbands and the children, where did they go?

Well, they had a building in the back that was set up for mothers and children.

Were the families allowed to...

Well they had shanty towns scattered where people with enough money to buy the stuff to make shanties would set them up. Or sometimes they would come in prefab shanties and it was usually the "haves" - not the "have nots."

So there were families living together?

No. It was a place where they could store their stuff except from under their beds. They could set up their little hibachi stoves out there and cook and eat their meals out there instead of in this tent-like structure that they used for a dining room. So the nurses fell heir to one of these when two Canadian couples were repatriated they donated their shanties to the Navy nurses. But there were quite a number of shanty towns with their peculiar little names.

So the shanty towns were used for just storing material. They were living in them.

Yes. But the "haves" would socialize and give parties and this kind of stuff.

But when the day was over, they were obligated to return to their berthing areas.

They would have to go back to their rooms.

Internees were running the camp but it was with Japanese say so. Were there such things as bed checks or roll calls?

Yes, absolutely. Sometimes...drinking was taboo and strangely enough it was the executive committee members who knew how to drink and the commandant's Filipino chauffeur would supply them with liquor. But sometimes these people, not the executive committee types seemed to know what they were doing but others would manufacture liquor out of almost anything or get it smuggled in one way or another. They'd pass out in their shanties and they'd get caught. Of course, they had a jail inside of a jail.

How did the internee government deal with violators of the rules. For example, if they caught someone drinking, did they have a little court set up and try people?

I don't remember the court there as such but when the head of the committee on order would find a violator...when a violation of some kind came up, they would jail them in a room set aside for that purpose. Incidentally speaking of the camp population, there were the prostitutes and there were the missionaries. And often you'd hear the women say, "Well, they'd rather have a prostitute in their room than a missionary who is always putting notes on their pillows or some other thing."

The lesser of the two evils. But this activity would go on secretly. For example, after a bed check people would meet in a part of the camp where there was privacy and they would go about their business.

Well, there were two patios within the building. You know in old Spanish style they had patios within the outside of the building. In the patios, they had the palm trees and one thing or another. And after dark...after sunset, people would gather there and, in fact, some of them would set up their own little tables out there with their hibachis and things. And they would add to the line chow. After dark, it had a lot of little cozy corners around there. At first, the committee ignored these secrets little trysts but then when the Japanese put their thumb down on people touching each other and they were making quite a deal about it, it was a matter of no touching no babies.

That didn't always work because I'm sure there were babies in the camp.

Yes, there were. In fact, Peggy and I were on duty when a woman was brought in for a delivery. With that, the Japs really wanted all the pregnant women named and the husbands were jailed-- "The pregnant fathers club." Some of the pregnant women couldn't say which ones were the fathers. It was surprising the number of venereal diseases that developed in the camp. I shouldn't say it should be surprising but it happened. But, still they had medications to take care of that.

We will go back to will go back to Santo Tomas now or rather Los Baños because I think I've learned a lot, certainly more than I've ever known before about how this operation worked --this little community amongst itself. But suffice it to say that you all decided to go to Los Baños and you finally started packing up. How did all of that happen?

We got our stuff out in time. The luggage was sent the day before we were to leave. Boy, it was a hassle getting our stuff together and getting it on the trucks. And when you see everything you own going out the gate, all these little treasured things—a tin can, a little bar of soap--all these things are so precious. Would you ever see them again. Anyway, bright and early in the morning...

This was May 1943.

The loud speaker came on and "It's time to get up. It's time to get up. So, they had an early breakfast for the departing internees. And they were playing all these songs on recordings. People were down there crying and all this and this kind of sentimental stuff. And the nurses went out on the last truck and about that time, they were playing "Anchors Aweigh" and everybody clapped.

Who was playing it?

They had a radio room, a broadcasting system there that played music during the evenings. And it was used for making announcements and what not.

So they were playing "Anchors Aweigh." How did you react to that?

So, since the Army kind of took over, we were kind of thinking nobody gave a hoot about us because when we came in they sort of looked as and "What are you doing here? Why aren't you out in Bataan with the rest of them?" Then when the Army nurses came in, it was such a welcoming celebration. Then we kind of got the feeling that maybe we weren't that important to the internees. But, they let us know that we appreciated too.

At any rate, they took us out into trucks the whole 800 and us. Well, the box cars were smaller than the western style box cars but here's that train engine smoking. We came in last and we were held back as the men got on these medal box cars. When they started closing the doors, the doctors and the new administrative committee chairman, this is what they called him for Los Baños rather than executive committee, they protested loudly and the Japanese lieutenant said they would open one of the doors. But if any of them tried to escape, they would be shot and these people would be responsible. In any event, we weren't sure what they were going to do with us. Finally, they took us over there. The men were all in the cars and they put two of us in each of the first cars...I don't know whether they were first or last.

So, there were two nurses in the cars with the men per car?

Yes. So, when they opened doors there, we nurses were sitting there with our feet hanging over.

Along the side of the car?

Yes. Along with some of the other internees. As it left in this slow motion with all this climbing and so on, we went through the city and the Filipinos were almost afraid to wave at us or anything. As we got further out, we could see they were not the happy carefree Filipinos that we had seen all these years. And it chugged along very slowly and it got so hot for the men in the back so they rotated. They wouldn't let us rotate with them.

The ones who were sitting in the back of the car came out to the side door?

But, they'd change positions every 15 minutes or so.

It must have been really hot in there.

Yes. But as the train went down, we all were kind of tired. I fell to sleep but this was a golden opportunity to introduce something about the ride and so on. Then we get down to the city of Los Baños and of course it is not the city that we had visited before. There was an agricultural college which was part of the University of the Philippines and they had taken about 55 or 60 acres and plotted and they only had a barbed wire fence around it. This was about 4 miles out from the city itself. It had an animal husbandry tree on one side of the gate as you came in. Then going down, it was on a slope. It was north at the top and sloped southward. As you came through the back gate, the archway there, the road became known as Roosevelt Road. We went past a 25-bed unit which was sitting on the slope of the ground and below it was a tributary that joined the wide river further south and beyond that was a gymnasium and MacArthur Boulevard dead ended there.

You called them by those names?

These were camp names. MacArthur Boulevard went up a little hill and it crossed Churchill Downs going northward dead ended at the YMCA building. The barbed wire fence closed off the fence halfway up the hill but on this side there was a reservoir and then farther down there were dormitory buildings. Then between Roosevelt Road and Churchill Downs, there was a soccer field and a band stand and a park-like recreational area. On the Roosevelt side, there were the faculty cottages.

The Japanese used the farther south dormitory for their headquarters. Then the administrative committee operated out the next dormitory. Then there was a road separated from that that we called Chapel Lane. It had a Chapel farther up there. Some of the Japanese garrison were in this next dormitory and then the nurses were in the next one right there on the corner of Roosevelt Road and Churchill Downs. We set up in the little hillside there.

So, all you nurses stayed together? You slept in the same area.

Yes. This was really great after tight quarters there to live in a building like this, two or three of the nurses in a room. We had plenty of space. Then the camp...the attitude of the men putting it together was just really breathing space down there. So everybody was so busy putting things together and organizing it.

Did you develop an internal government again just like you had at Santo Tomas?

Oh yes. It was set up like Santo Tomas. Santo Tomas was the parent organization. So when they were to be moved down there, they absorbed this camp.

There were people already down there when you got there?

No. The plan was that our administrative committee was secondary to the parent executive committee.

So it was like a subcamp of Santo Tomas.

Right.

What was the reason the Japanese decided to move? Was it to alleviate overcrowding at Santo Tomas?

No, they wanted to take the civilians out of Manila and put them away down south.

Was there a particular reason?

I don't know why. Of course, the internees thought they wanted to separate them from their friends and their package line and all this sort of thing. But, I think they wanted to get them out of there because they were influencing the Filipinos so strongly. Their presence there. That's just an assumption.

But you did say that when you got down to Los Baños...you mentioned the Japanese garrison. So in fact the Japanese Army was there. It wasn't the same type of thing where they had civilian administrators?

No. It was still civilians. It was still the Army of Occupation. We still had a "Mr." for a commandant.

What about the guards that accompanied you on the train?

Well, they were more military minded.

But once you got there, you were under the control of Japanese civilians rather than soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army.

But that was supposed to be a malarial belt down there but actually very few of the internees developed malaria there. Of course, some of them had already had malaria and they had these recurrent sessions.

Did you have quinine and things?

Yes. But anyway it was quite a hassle putting that little 25-bed unit into a hospital. It had been abandoned and apparently transient troops--both American and Japanese had used it as a quarters as they passed through. They had ripped the cupboards off the walls to make wood for fire.

So when you got there, things were pretty messed up.

Oh, yes.

So you had to clean it up and get it operating.

Yes. They had a series of little offices across the front in this sort of U-shaped arrangement as well as four-bed wards and two private rooms, I think, in one two-bed ward. Anyway, they were out over the kitchen. This was an extension because the ground was sloping underneath it. And underneath this was the kitchen which was right next to a one-bedroom apartment across the

lower end of the U. Then behind the kitchen was a pharmacy and storage rooms and so long and it overlooked this patio. The whole thing got put together pretty fast and it was 800 men.

It was that many men they took and were there dependents at this point?

No.

Just the men and the nurses at that point?

Yes.

When did the rest of the internees arrive?

Not until December.

So they went from May to December. You girls must have been in demand.

Well, they were very respectful. It was kind of like back to the days when after the dependents left.

Oh, back in 1940?

Yes.

The same kind of thing. So the dependents showed up in December?

Yes. They were supposed to come down there in July. In the meantime, they had these barracks being built and they were like the ones the Filipinos used. They were on a dirt floor. Well actually the first ten that were being built were supposed to be built on a cement floor. And toilet facilities were something else. One of the fellows who was very active in the construction of the camp itself, he and his crew watched the stuff going up and they were saying, "They're not putting enough support in that heavy weight nipa-type roof." And then the sidings were the same thing. It provided warmth in the cold weather and coolness in the summer. But, they were saying they're not putting enough support underneath that heavy roof and the next time it blows or a storm comes up, it's going to come down. And sure enough it did.

The women were supposed to come down in August as soon as the barracks were ready. But down they came. In any event, we had 12 orderlies. Bertha was a dietician and Peggy was usually in the clinic and Susie had the surgery.

But who did you use for surgeons?

All they did at that point was sterilizing the stuff for the clinic.

So there weren't any real doctors at that point.

Yes there was. There was Dr. Leach and Dr. Whitaker

.

They were civilians?

These were men who were Rockefeller Institute. They had been in Santo Tomas. In fact, they had an epidemic there in Santo Tomas. Maybe it was dysentery or something like that. The Japanese doctor came in and wanted to know why they couldn't control an epidemic when the Japanese could. They were really deriding Dr. Leach who was running the hospital there in Santo Tomas. So Dr. Leach quit. He didn't want any part of that kind of stuff. There were missionary doctors. In fact, the priest and the sisters and other missionaries who had churches in

the city were allowed to remain there. So when of the priest came in every Sunday on religious holidays to say mass, some of the other denominational ministers came in.

So you had two doctors working with you in the beginning.

But they were repatriated in August I think it was.

The American doctors?

Yes.

And they were repatriated in August of '43.

Yes. Then, we didn't have a doctor except this Polish doctor who was mostly related to research and sanitation and this sort of thing. Of course, we had a dentist there.

American?

Yes. By this time they had a little dental clinic and the whole bit. And we had beds and an odd collection of pieces for a surgery table.

Then in December did the entire Santo Tomas get moved in at that point?

No. In fact, they never came down there. They began to complain because the reservoir was too small to handle many more than what they had down there. So the Japanese from Santo Tomas and the central downtown officials came down and looked at it and after a while they decided that it wouldn't do for the entire group. So they limited the maximum to 3,000 and it never even got to that level. But in the meantime, the two doctors left and in their place, the doctor who had been at Baguio came. They had more doctors than they needed up there. Baguio was a resort area.

Up north of Manila.

Yes. It was up near the mountainous climate up near the world-renowned rice terraces. It was run by the Army but they let the Navy could go up there to for R&R - a term that we'd never heard before.

O.K. So you're down there. The camp life. Once some of the internees came down from Santo Tomas you had another going camp. How did the camp life there differ from what you had experienced at Santo Tomas?

Well, it was a lot of mud. It was more rainfall there. It was down closer to the equator of course. But, then despite that, it was a happier group. The administrative committee was more compelled. They enjoyed doing it. Those who worked in the garden did it just for the joy of getting out there and exercising. They liked to work up a sweat as they chopped the wood.

So there were really more things to do for people to keep occupied because it was in a country environment and there was wood to be cut whereas in Santa Tomas being the city people didn't have anything to do.

Yes. And then with animal husbandry there we had more meat in our stew. And vegetables because it was an agricultural area. And the vegetables that came in, we had a little canteen. They were better a lot more pineapples and coconuts and so on. Anyway, the doctor from Baguio came down to replace these other doctors. He was sort of a young fellow. One of those

kind of charismatic characters that got out there with the baseball teams and joined the men just to chop the wood. He was very well accepted by the group. He was very social and very concerned about the patients. He was a surgeon and he brought his own instruments and what not. So patients that had been sent back up to Manila any surgical types of conditions that couldn't be handled before were now handled there with Dr. [Dana] Nance. And with him came the first priest. He was very much welcomed by the Catholic nurses and the Catholics in the community. I think there was already a minister there or maybe one came down at that point.

I was telling you about the facilities and the barracks. They had these two long barracks that were about 90 feet by 30 feet wide and they sat parallel but between them there was a connecting section there. So it made sort of figure-H configuration. Charlie, this guy who was the head of the construction group...they were piping water in there for the showers and they were supposed to have sinks brought down and toilets and what not. So Charlie offered to dig the cesspool. They got started on that. First they laid cement in the first two barracks there and then so sorry no more cement. Then Charlie and his men dug the cesspool and got all ready. And so sorry no toilets and no sinks. So there was a lot of bickering going on about the toilet facilities. So Charlie came up with the monumental idea of a trough running under the board like in the old outhouses. Then they rigged up a large tank a 15 or 20 gallon tank to set up at the end of the trough...the top end and it had a float in it. And when the water got a certain level, it would trip it and all of a sudden "Wham" would come this gush of water down into the cesspool.

So it was like a little outhouse with a trough running through it. Then this water would flush everything down into the cesspool automatically.

Yes.

Where did the water come from?

It was piped in. There was an overhead piping there by this same shower arrangement that they had up in Santo Tomas. It was just all these spigots in there and so on. But, the first storm knocked all the barracks down. They were pretty well underway and down they came. But, finally they got them up so they were strong enough to withstand the storms.

So, the women were supposed to come down again from Santo Tomas and then a typhoon hit Santo Tomas. Of course, Los Baños got its share of the storm too. So that delayed the women coming down again. Finally, they came down around the middle of December or late November. They came on the train and of course it was all this excitement and what not. They changed the whole outlook of the camp. That brought touches of civilization and the sanitation with it - tablecloths on the table and salt and pepper shakers and this kind of stuff.

So they added a little civilization to the place.

Yes.

What was the life like there with the arrival? Was it pretty much as it had been? Except you said it was healthier because you had...although it was a malaria area, you said there were a few cases of malaria...but people had an opportunity to exercise, to go out and cut wood, to do the chores that needed to be done to keep the community going.

And they had records you know recordings and so on and they played at the bandstand. And they had baseball games and it was really country club living compared to the others.

Did you have problems with people trying to escape the way you did in Santo Tomas?

No. There was no place to go to.

At that point were there feelings of being forgotten? Or when is this going to be over with?

No. It's another three months and another three months and so on. But everybody was so busy in what they were doing. There were complaints about the orderlies--their inefficiency and what not. So, I started a class with the orderlies.

Who were the orderlies?

Just young men like the cooks in the kitchen. They were just men who...

They volunteered to do this kind of work?

Well, they had their work detail program and men could sign up for things that they wanted to do and, if possible, they got that job.

O.K. I asked you about the life in the camp and if you felt forgotten and you said every month you expected to be out of there and you were busy anyway doing all of these chores. I had heard, I think it was from Mary Rose Nelson, that it was a lot of ingenuity in the camp and someone had actually built a radio.

Oh, yes. At the end of 1942 on New Year's Day, somebody posted the notice on who won the Army-Navy football game and the Japs found out and wanted to know who told them that, where they got this information because it certainly wasn't in the paper. So, again, they searched for radios and like in Santa Scholastica they looked in all sorts of places.

Did they find any?

No. No. Everybody would standby. And, of course, people were writing their diaries which was against the rule. They would hide these in every place they could think of to hide them. In fact, this book written on Santo Tomas was kept very secretly.

You said people were able to build radios and hide them. So, you could hear how the war was going, if you were in the dark.

Well, this Charlie character...he was something else. He evidently had contrived one of these. He was with Pan Am.

What was his last name?

His name was George Messinger [Charles George Messinger, died December 1944 of disease] I call him Charlie. He would start rumors. He would start something that was very startling in the way of news and would wait to hear what it turned into by the end of the day. This sort of thing went on but whenever something was really learned that was important, it was usually in the newspaper anyway in a diverted sense. But, of course, we heard about the Doolittle raid and that was another reason why the search for radios came up.

That was in '42. So that was pretty early on. You were probably in Santa Scholastica when that happened.

No, we were in Santo Tomas. That was after Bataan fell.

It was the spring of '42 when the Doolittle raid occurred.

Anyway, everybody was feeling so depressed about Bataan falling and so on. And to hear about the Doolittle raid, that was something to cheer us up.

So you heard when you were at Los Baños. Would you say that you were well informed or moderately informed?

No. I wouldn't say we were. We got newspapers. They had a shuttle bus going from Santo Tomas to Los Baños and the driver of the bus would sometimes bring down copies of newspapers.

When I said well-informed I didn't mean necessarily well informed from the Japanese point of view but you know or you generally did know how the war was going. The allies were starting to counterattack and were beginning to win back.

Well, those who had radios were very reluctant about telling anybody that they had them. So George Messenger would sometimes come up with bits of news but he would distort in the sense that would not relate him to a radio.

I was thinking in terms of something that Dr. [Alfred] Smith told me. He said he didn't build it. Someone had built a radio and hid it in a chair and the way they would spread the rumor was he'd hear the news and then the rumor would start getting spread around and then people would ask well where did you hear that and he said one of the Filipinos said it. Someone from the outside said it. In other words, the rumor always started somewhere else so they never could pin it down to where it came from. That way nobody knew this guy had a radio. So I imagined it worked something like that.

So life was O.K. Now, what were you eating? You said there was some meat because there was animal husbandry going on. So there was caribou, water buffalo or what kind of meat were you eating?

Caribou mainly. And they had pigs.

And you were growing things in the garden?

Yes.

You were able to grow food. What kind of food?

It was mostly egg plants or camotes which are sort of a sweet potatoes and green vegetables. Then of course there was rice as usual and mango beans and duck eggs were available. The main kitchen operated there with a vertigo (grocery storage room) attached to it. There just seem to be plenty of rice.

So you weren't hard pressed for food. People were getting fed appropriately. I want to hear about the raid. I want to hear about the rescue.

You do?

Yes. I'm kind of leading up to the finale of this story. But before we do, there are a couple of little things I want to understand about Los Baños. It was a different thing in that the people lived differently and everyday life was more pleasant because you had this country living.

Before we talk about the rescue, which was obviously dramatic. I want to ask you a little bit about some of the relationships. Did you have any Army nurses at this point?
No.

You were the only nurses?
Yes.

With the exception of some of the Catholic nuns who came down.

Well, they hadn't been admitted yet. They came in around the middle of July. In the meantime, the military took over at Santo Tomas in late '43. There was a supply officer [Saadaki] Konishi, who made life miserable for them in Santo Tomas. In the first part of '44, another group of 200 people came down. Then, it was still country club living at that point. Then as all these other people in Santo Tomas were brought down, the Japs kept bringing up civilians from the South and from all other directions. All these people were brought in. Right as soon as we left, the place filled up again but this time with old people. And so there were few able-bodied men to take care of this load. It really became very hard in Santo Tomas. But, around March or April, I guess, they sent down 500 people to Los Baños. Most of them were the no doers--the loafers.

This is March '44?

Yes. And the whole spirit of the camp changed. There was no more country club living. These people were...not all of them...like every place else it's the criminals who stand out to be seen rather than the good people. But the whole camp just kind of fell apart and the food situation began to deteriorate. The whole situation changed dramatically. In any event, Dr. Nance was one of those loud spoken people and he'd go directly to the commandant rather than through the committee and he'd demand things and he'd get them. And so if they wanted anything done, get Nance to do it. So in the meantime, Nance and the lab technician were dickering with the Japs. They'd get food from the Japs in exchange for drugs.

They would give the Japanese drugs? Why couldn't the Japanese just take the drugs? They were in a position to take whatever they wanted. Why did they have to be forced to deal on that basis?

Well, these were still...

Civilian people.

Yes. We weren't quite under as much of the military routine as the other. In any event, my friend who was working in the kitchen was kind of suspicious because he was made judge incidentally. They had a board of judges. When somebody was first caught stealing the stuff from the Japs you know the lumber and what not. They set up a board of judges and he was named judge. He suspected that they lab technician was dickering or trading with the Japs and so he was evidently talking about this and the next thing you know he's fired. Dr. Nance admitted that if the lab technicians was doing anything wrong, he was guilty as well.

Well, of course, by this time the nurses were in the apartment in this tight quarters. Eldene Paige and I asked if we could move into the barracks which we did which was right across the street from the hospital and that gave a little more space. Everybody was for the doctor who needed to maintain his health to take care of the camp. It was really something else. So about August the Japs were bringing in the missionaries, the priests, and the sisters.

This was '44?

Yes. So they gave them very little time to prepare and they all of a sudden show up in Los Baños and so they isolated them. By then, they had around 18 or 20 barracks mostly empty, at this point, in the upper level. So they took all of these missionaries up there--the priests and the sisters and some of the other religious groups, the protestant groups--and isolated them from the camp. So this became Vatican City and this lower level was hell's half acre. But before this, Italy had more or less capitulated so the Italians were brought in and they were admitted. Several of those came down to Los Baños.

As internees?

Yes. As time went by where the food situation lessened considerably, in the meantime, [Saadaki] Konishi, a lieutenant in the Japanese Army, was sent down there.⁵

Things were getting bad in the camp by the summer of '44.

They were really beginning to deteriorate.

You were leading up to the rescue.

Tom changed his job and he was working with Konishi.

What was his job before the war?

He was working with Lockheed flying planes out for the Dutch and he and George Messinger and his co-pilot were picked up there. They could have gone...you ordinarily were flown back as soon as they'd delivered the PBYS to the Dutch. But this time they were bumped from the Pan Am flight back when [Kichisaburō] Nomura⁶ was traveling to Washington before Pearl Harbor.

And [Saburu] Kurusu⁷.

They were bumped so these people could go to Washington. George was the land operation officer there in the Philippines. He was trying to make arrangements with these guys to go back on Army flights which failed and the officers were supposed to be flown back. The rest went back on the ship. So they could have gone back on the ship but...

So he ended up being picked up and interned.

The three of them were.

Now let's get back to Los Baños. He's now working with ...

Konishi.

Now Konishi was at Santo Tomas. Did he move down to Los Baños, too? He was the supply guy in the Japanese army who was making life tough at Santo Tomas. Did he come down too?

Right after the last group showed up.

⁵ After the war, Konishi was tried as a war criminal for a massacre he ordered in retaliation for the Los Baños raid. He was convicted and hanged.

⁶ Ambassador to the United States during the Pearl Harbor attack.

⁷ Special envoy to the U.S. co-negotiating with Nomura to avert war between Japan and the U.S.

O.K. now Santo Tomas was now vacant in terms of internees. It was closed as a camp.
Oh, no. Santo Tomas was still overflowing with people.

So now where they had one camp they have two camps going. But, Konishi was making life miserable at Santo Tomas, now comes south to Los Baños, making your lives more directly miserable.

Yes. At any rate, things really got tough. Then the Japs decided to cut off the south end of the camp, just south of the hospital. So the gymnasium, the YMCA, and the whole bit down there, the cottages that were being used to house these people was no longer available. And all the little shanty towns down there were gone. They had to move up into the upper camp. Of course, that opened the Vatican City and hill's half acre into one camp. But as the weeks went by, the situation was getting more critical and by the end of the year...of course, by then, Leyte had been taken.

Did you know that at the time?

No. But I guess we knew it in a sense.

In other words, as things were going better for the allies and worse for the Japanese, things were getting worse for you because the Japanese were getting pretty nervous already. They were losing ground and they realized that it was just a matter of time. So, your lives became more directly miserable as their fortunes began to fail.

But, in the meantime, it was probably July or August in that area, the Japanese decided they weren't going to pay the internees, much like they did the POWs. So, they had all the money in the camp collected and this they had done in Santo Tomas already. I think we were under military rule by now.

So they took the money away.

The "haves" were suffering along with everybody else which was quite a source of chuckling among the "have nots." Anyway, back to the end of the year, the camp had a very negative attitude toward the religious because they had signed papers to allow them to stay outside in which they agreed not to assist the Allies against the Japanese or this sort of thing. It was sort of a tongue in cheek agreement. Anyway, there was a very negative attitude toward these people. When it came Christmas time, it was of course a very gloom sort of Christmas.

December '44?

Yes. The priest and the sisters put on a songfest. They were singing not religious songs but songs like "Always," "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle," and these other songs and they would fill them with purities (?) like were going to Leyte. Anyway, they were very cleverly done and the whole camp was just delighted with it. So the missionaries took on a different...they did nothing to proselytize anyone into the Catholic religion. And everybody had a different attitude toward them at that point.

They hadn't done that before or they were doing that before had been proselytizing.

No, not really. They didn't allow them to. But at any rate, Christmas Eve they had a midnight mass and practically the whole camp turned out for it. It was the most spectacular mass I've ever

seen. Some of the priests had made these figures of the nativity scene and all out of the sand. It was just a beautiful mass. Then on Christmas day. There were no gifts involved rarely if any and there was just a spirit of friendliness between the people. There was a handshake or just looking at one or another or a Merry Christmas or Happy New Year. It had more meaning than ever before. It was a beautiful Christmas.

Do you know why people felt that way? They were just happy to be alive at that point?
Probably.

The food situation had gotten much worse, too, which accounts for the way that you all looked when you were rescued. You all looked like you were down to your last pound. The whole idea of the rescue, of course it came as a surprise but apparently from what we know now, the Filipino guerrillas or scouts who were operating with our forces knew the layout of the camp. They knew everything. How was that? Were there people going from the inside to the outside giving information? I remember Mary Harrington said there was a path in the back that people could sneak out of and people were able to sneak back and forth on occasion.

Well, on the 1st of the year...January 9th actually was the day that the landing in Lingayen Gulf happened and the American troops started coming down. In the meantime, when this happened, the administrative committee was awakened in the middle of the night and the Jap commandant told them that they were leaving. That the whole garrison was leaving and advised that they were turning the camp over to the administrative committee and advised them not to go outside.

So, in the first thing in the morning....well they had called and wanted all of the shuttles brought in...they took them with them. And, of course, it awakened the whole camp and they left about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. So, the administrative committee called the attention "Today at this time we're announcing you are free. This is Captain Freedom. We're going to have breakfast at such and such time. We're going to have at here and we're going to have supper at this time." By then, we were only getting two meals a day, skimpy meals at that.

What were the meals?

That we were usually getting? Well, we had sort of a coffee, you could call it such, at 10 o'clock in the morning and then supper around 4 o'clock.

And what was the food? Rice? Camote tops?

Well it was rice diluted to a pasty lugao, which POWs were experiencing for a long time. There was practically no meat in the stew. It was very watery. And, of course, we used to have coconut milk and this sort of thing but the coconuts had gotten so expensive they were unavailable anymore.

So you guys were starting to live or starting to eat like the other POWs at this point and so that's why you were losing all of the weight you were losing.

Yes. But with the Japs going in bodegas which were well filled.

Did they all leave? Did they all just vacated?

Yes.

Because I remember there were guards who had to be overcome when the raiders came in.
Well, they walked out on us. The committee was told to keep...you know everybody should stay inside.

This was January...

January 9th. The same time the invasion of the Lingayen Gulf was happening. So, where they came from, I don't know. But a flagpole was set up and the American flag was raised and they sang the national anthem and tears were running down everybody's face. Of course, they couldn't live it up. It was taken down immediately and the British flag was raised and the British national anthem was sung. Oh, it was a very emotional moment.

This happened in the morning?

Yes. As soon as the camp was declared "Freedom Camp."

Were there any Japanese around at this point or they were gone. They left?

Yes. But a group of them - the migrating bunch of Japanese - came to the gate and not finding anybody there, they stayed at the gate for a while and then they left. So for the next few days, it was really something else. The Filipinos came in and what they needed was clothing. They were practically thread bare. So, we exchanged clothing for food and...Oh, it was pretty great. We had full tummies for a week and then back they came.

Where did the food come from at that point?

The Japs.

Oh, I see, you had access to the Japanese food. So you were free for a week.

In fact, the internees raided the Jap supplies. The disciplinary committee couldn't control them. They tried to get them to leave things as they were and not to do anything crazy. But here they just went through the Japanese quarters and they picked up everything that was useful to them. A radio was taken.

How many days did this freedom last?

Just a week.

And then what happened?

In the meantime, the administrative committee moved into the quarters so that they could be right there at the gate when the American forces came in. So, they were awakened during the night and here's old Konishi's ugly old face. And also the commandant. They were just beat, so tired. The commandant said, "We have come back to protect you."

Where had they been? At the front?

Apparently, they went north of Manila. I don't know whether they did it under orders actually or whether they did it because they thought the Americans were landing down in the south.

So they are back again and pretty exhausted from whatever experience they had. Were they a little surly finding that their quarters had been raided?

Well, they said that they were back and so on and just flopped on the closest bed. Anyway, it was a real miserable thereafter.

What was your reaction, suddenly being freed and expecting the Americans to come in and suddenly the Japanese are back. It must have seemed like a bad dream, a recurring bad dream. So, what did you all do at that point?

Well, they wanted everything back. They wanted their radio and all their own possessions and golly it was impossible. In the meantime, they issued five pounds of rice to each internee.

Did they try to punish anyone for what had happened while they were gone?

No. They wanted to know if everybody was still there and of course Pete Miles and one of the other men had gone out. They evidently already had contact with the guerrillas. He was an engineer I think.

Pete Miles?

Yes. And so they went out and joined the guerrillas. By this time there was quite a guerrilla army going on down there in the south area. It was led by an Army officer who had never been captured. He had escaped being captured. So, when...

Konishi and the gang came back these two guys were missing.

Yeah but they altered the records.

So, they didn't know anyone was missing.

No. But they were still those in the camp who had contact with the Filipinos outside and they'd sneak under the fence and come back and the guards would shoot anybody who attempted to escape. So, this one man went out and he was coming back with coconuts and stuff for this woman who was quite ill. And he was coming back in and a Jap guard shot and killed him. So, they protested that it was only escaping not returning prisoners who were to be shot. Anyway, the commandant had put on quite a protest.

That is the internees protested?

No, the commandant himself was talking to the administrative committee. He said to advise these people not to do this, not to attempt to escape or they would be shot. The administrative committee had already advised them. This was an example. Then two more of the internees were caught coming back in and so again another man went out. This time, he was caught as he came back in. He was shot but was not dead and left lying in the road there. The doctors rushed out, wanting to bring him up to the hospital. "No. No. Let him stay."

After the guy moaned and groaned for a while, the Japs shot him again. Then they took a stretcher down there and brought him up to the hospital to prepare for his burial. I was on duty at the time they brought him in. In putting my hand under his head, I felt brain tissue, this slimy brain tissue on my hand. I had recognized this man from the way he laughed. I had known him all these months, not intimately but I knew him as one of the guys in the camp. It was kind of an eerie feeling like the crucifixion of Christ. I felt like I couldn't get my hands clean. It was really quite an emotional experience.

But from then on MacArthur's troops came down toward Manila and as they passed the Cabanatuan area, they freed the remaining prisoners there. As they passed the different areas

where prisoners were being held, they released them. It was February 3rd when the tanks came tearing through the walls or the front gate at Santo Tomas.

At Santo Tomas in Manila.

Yes. And a couple of days later they went through a Bilibid wall. By the 5th, they took the POWs out of Manila, which by then was on fire. But, here we're sitting behind the enemy lines. When MacArthur came in to see the internees at Santo Tomas, he learned about Los Baños. So he told Major General [Joseph] Swing with his paratroopers, the 11 Airborne Division, to free this camp as soon as possible.

Well, they were all tied up doing all these other things. Finally, they get around to it about the 18th of February. In the meantime, he had planned all the steps that should be taken in trying to relieve this camp. It was something different. So far, they had only relieved prisoners in their line of advance. But this was going behind the enemy line to rescue a little over 2,100 people and sick civilians. Do you want all these details about what was happening outside the camp?

Well from your point of view.

The reason I'm saying this is because it was relevant to what happened to us.

O.K.

The paratroopers themselves were to fly over Los Baños at a specific hour. [The paratroopers were to drop into the camp as Filipino guerrillas entered the camp, neutralized the Japanese guards, and set fires for smoke signals for the drop.] In the meantime, they [U.S. troops] had to secure a place to take the internees. They captured the new Bilibid Prison at Muntinlupa. The Red Cross came in a set it up to accept the internees. The plan was to have amtracs take them across the freed prisoners across the lake [Laguna de Bay] and down to Muntinlupa.

The Americans had already done reconnaissance. They had already talked to Pete Miles who had provided a map of exactly what the camp was like.

The guerrillas came close to the camp a couple of nights before and had canvassed the area. Once the guerrillas and paratroopers had secured the camp, the incoming amtracs which would have landed on the beach about 4 miles out from the camp, would evacuate the freed prisoners.

None of you knew anything was going on at this point. Who was on night duty when all this occurred.

I was.

You were on?

Yes. But nothing ever happened when I was on.

Except for the big one.

Yeah.

But your morale had really gone down by this time.

Yes. I don't know at this point I just didn't care one way or the other.

Did the others feel that way too?

I don't know. It was just if it's going to happen it's going to happen. If God wants me that way that's fine.

So what happened that night?

But there was an infant there a new born baby. So, I was trying to feed her with what little powdered milk was left. You know, the mother could hardly nurse the baby. She hadn't had enough nourishment herself. Anyway, I was feeding this baby and changing her diaper. I thought, Oh this little thing would make a good entree for a meal. It reminded me of chicken dinners my mother prepared and so on. Anyway, I got the baby all wrapped and put her back with her mother and so on. No, I think I still had the baby in my arms when we noticed these smoke signals going up. I didn't recognize them as anything. At 7 o'clock the Japanese had calisthenics.

Seven a.m.?

Every morning they always had their calisthenics and their rifle and so on were locked away. And we noticed the smoke signals that were going up. Nobody paid any attention to it of course then all of a sudden, we saw the formation of aircraft coming over. You know you'd see Jap planes going over there. So we didn't pay much attention to it until they came down low enough and here on the front one was this sign "Rescue." And as the paratrooper started jumping out, the [guerrilla] soldiers around the guard houses started killing the Japanese guards.

So the guerrillas were already there hiding behind the guard houses.

Yes. The guerrillas and the recon group, the ghost platoon.

They were in place and ready to take care of the guards.

Yes. And at this specific hour everything happened at once. And the amtracs were coming in and the gate there right next to the hospital, the swali-covered fence they had put up, they came crashing through. Of course, the internees were beginning to line up for their roll call out there. All of this gunfire all at once. And the Japs are running.

And where were you at this point? Holding the baby?

Yes.

You were still holding the baby?

Yes. I was holding the baby I guess to cover her ears I guess so that the noise wouldn't affect the baby or something or other. Then the major who was in charge of the whole thing jumped out of the amtrac that circled in the circular driveway there at the hospital and wanted to know who was in charge. Of course, the doctor, he's in charge. Then the troops got out. Oh, we never saw anything so handsome in our lives. These fellows in camouflage uniforms and [wearing] their new kind of helmets, not these little tin pan things we were used to seeing. And they looked so healthy and so lively and so alert. Oh, it was a sight to be seen.

Anyway, trying to organize this camp, I overlooked one other thing, there was a diversionary group that was attracting the Japanese attention northward and they were supposed to come down to join the camp from the other side and the internees were to be taken out on the amtracs which were not built to go inland so far. They were made to take artillery and vehicles

ashore. They were not made to go 4 miles inland. They had yet to be serviced. In any event, they were to take the internees out and anyone who could walk were to go back with troops.

Well, trying to organize these people... They were civilians and not military-minded and so they were just going in all directions. They were confused. They wanted to take everything they had. They didn't want to leave anything.

These are the internees?

Yes. All the firing was over in about 15 minutes and then it was trying to organize these people. The troops set fire to the Japanese barracks and we could hear all this ammunition and stuff popping and what not.

Were there any Japanese prisoners? Did they take any prisoners? Or were they all dead by this time?

Some of them escaped, including Konishi. They had run back in the wooded area there but they knew they had only a limited time because it was only about a few hours march from where they knew that Japanese forces were. Of course, there were about 800 Japanese around there in that immediate area that was sniper fire and so on to contend with. It took about an hour to get these people moving. Ms. Cobb told us to just get a suitcase and take just what you needed. They had to set fire to the barracks to get these people started.

They actually started fires to get people out of there.

Yes. They burned up the barracks.

Just to get them moving.

Yes. Well, of course they had started them but there were always these stragglers.

O.K. Was there a lot of yelling going on, people "Get moving! Get moving!"?

Oh, yeah. They were trying to urge them on. They were trying to be patient with and understanding. Major General Swing told them that these people aren't military. So, he had heard about how they behaved in Europe. So, they were kind of being patient. Anyway, it took about hour. By the time they had 1,500 people on this amtracs and they had started down to the lake. And there were about 1,500 see there was still about...you know the remaining ones...and the plan was that those who could still walk were to go with the troops back overland.

He's got all these people to deal with.

Yea. And he wasn't sure that they were coming in to pick up these troops. So, two or three of the amtracs stopped. They conked out. So, those of us who were left had to walk down to the lake. In the meantime, they got everybody out of the camp except...there were some of the priests and the sisters who were farther back up on the hill...and they were trying to get these amtracs running. Well they did. They got this one that was marked "Impatient Virgin." As we were walking down, here comes this "Impatient Virgin" loaded with priests and sisters. Not many people were much interested in amusing signs like this.

You were walking with the other nurses?

No, only Eldene Paige and Bertha Evans, and I were left among the nurses then.

What happened to the other ones?

They had gone out on the amtracs with the patients.

How many people could they fit in an amtrac?

Well, in the cargo area, I guess when you've got patients that are stretched out, these don't have very many, but I imagine maybe 20 or 25 people, maybe more than that.

Now were there any casualties as a result of the rescue?

No. By the time we got back up to Muntinlupa, where they had expected to lose half of this group as well as their own, there were only two soldiers, I think, that were killed, and one of the internees was injured with shrapnel. This whole thing went off with just the most amazing precision that you could imagine. Then, Colonel Swing wanted the major to take over the city of Los Baños. Of course, by now the soldiers had given their food stuffs to the internees, what they carried and so on. They hadn't had much rest and they needed an R&R in the worst way.

What were the circumstance of that famous photograph that Carl Mydens⁸ took of you and an internee?

Well, Carl Mydens had been an internee. He and his wife were picked up in Manila when the Japanese took over and both of them were among those who were evacuated in August or September of '42. They came back the on an exchange and Carl was there when they came into Manila and the internees were just delighted to see Carl. So, when they second group of amtracs came back to pick us up, Carl was on one of these.

This was at the lake now?

Yes.

At Muntinlupa?

No. After the first amtracs went back part of them came back to pick up the rest of us and Carl was on one of these. On the amtrac that Peggy and I left on, we asked if we could sit up front and one of the internees fainted there in the cargo area. And he was lifted up to us and Carl jumped up there and took our pictures. This eventually or one of them appeared in "World War II" by Winston Churchill edited by *Life*.

So that's what happened at that point. After you were liberated from Los Baños, where did they take you?

We stayed for a few days to take care of our patients until the Army nurses came down. Then we were flown back, I think to Clark Field either that or Nichols Field and from there we were flown down to Leyte. It was really heartbreaking to see that city in such a shambles. The Navy yard, of course, nobody even wanted to look at it. It was such a mess. But, down in Leyte we were taken to ADM [Thomas C.] Kinkaid's headquarters.

That's when those photographs were taken of you and ADM Kinkaid?

⁸ Carl Mydans, an American photographer, worked for the Farm Security Administration and *Life* magazine. Mydans and his wife were captured by the invading Japanese forces in the Philippines and interned for nearly a year at the Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila, then for another year in Shanghai, China, before they were released as part of a prisoner-of-war exchange in December 1943.

Yes.

You were flown by a C-47?

Yes.

You were still wearing these outfits that you had made. I heard that you had made these out of cloth that you had found.

Before we left Cañacao, while we were still getting ready to go, the supply master brought over some denims--work pants...sailors' work pants and work shirts. Of course, none of them fitted us. Women's hips are much different than men's. At any event, Miss Cobb said be sure and take them with you. In Los Baños, our uniforms had become shredded. They were just so worn. So, we took the blue jeans apart and Goldie [Goldia O'Haver] made the same kind of uniforms. She patterned them after the ones that we were wearing. So we transferred the buttons to these and we were back in business in uniforms.

So those are those uniforms you were rescued in? They were blue denim?

Yes.

O.K. So you're at ADM Kinkaid's and he posed with all those pictures of you. I noticed even as I look at those pictures, some of you look like you're in a daze. Things have happened so quickly and your weakened and weakened condition from starvation and what not. In fact, there's one picture of you in which you're seated and it looks like you've just passed out or just been revived or something. What was the circumstance?

Well, I don't think I ever recovered from being on night duty so long and all of this walking and so on. When we got there, I was still kind of washed out. I fainted. So, they brought up a chair and I sat on the chair on the right side the group.

Was that the same day as the rescue?

No. No. This was a few days later.

Then there are some scenes of you and the others sitting down at a long mess table and you're eating. The silverware is set and there are men all around. It looks like everyone is talking to you nurses. There's a photograph and you're having a meal and ADM Kinkaid is seated down at one end of the table. You have never seen that picture?

No. But, I remember the dinner that they served these beautiful steaks.

How did that food taste to you then?

Oh, I couldn't eat it.

Couldn't eat it?

No. You know your stomach has shrunk after this time. In fact, in Muntinlupa in the new Bilibid prison, people were gorging themselves and making themselves sick from this sudden change. I don't know about the others, but I had an awful hard time trying to eat that.

Then there were a lot of photographs which kind of look like almost publicity pictures. There's a photograph of you sitting maybe that's on the edge of a bed with a happy look and you're daintily reaching in for some chocolates.

Oh, that was when I got home.

Oh, that was later much later.

It was a public relations man who came over.

And the picture and you and another nurse sort of primping getting ready like you're going out on a date or something. You're standing in front of a mirror and you're both putting on make up. You've never seen that picture either?

No.

You know I'm going to have to send you copies of some of the pictures that you may not have in your collection. I'll send you xerox copies and you pick the ones you like.

There in Honolulu in the Navy uniforms, we didn't even know that we had rank. So, we started out as ensign. I remember going downtown we had money in our pockets and going into the stores and the displays of all this wonderful that we hadn't seen in so long, I came out with my arms loaded. And I think these sailors thought this was kind of a funny thing to see - an officer with her arms loaded. So, they saluted me and I didn't even know how to salute.

You never had to do it before. When you were a nurse you didn't have to salute because you didn't have rank.

No. The Army nurses had relative rank at that point. In fact, they had it quite a number of years. They had relative rank and uniforms. So, this was kind of a surprise to see them in uniforms out there.

What were the circumstances of you getting the Army uniforms? At what in the process of coming home did you get the Army uniforms?

I think it was at Kwajalein and here he were freezing to death in this C-47. But, there at Kwajalein the Army nurses lent us their winter uniforms so we wouldn't freeze to death. Then when we got home they gave us Navy uniforms and some nice warm coats to wear to when we arrived in San Francisco.

I noticed along the way, too, there are photographs of you being interviewed by war correspondents. There's a woman and some men interviewing you. You guys were celebrities. You said that the rescue happened at the same time as other events were going on - February '45 there were other things happening.

Iwo Jima was right in the throes of very heavy fighting.⁹

So you were kind of on the back page. But then somewhere along the way you guys became celebrities. When did that happen? When did people suddenly realize "My gosh there are these Navy nurses who have been prisoners all this time and now they're free!"

⁹ The Los Baños raid took place the same day as the flag-raising on Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi, thereby eclipsing news of the rescue.

Well, I think there in Leyte we began to see the flashing lights and then as we got closer to home more flashing lights and then of course in Honolulu.

Flashbulbs going off. And then you got home. Did you go through that type of thing that other prisoners go through--the shock of freedom.

Oh, yes. We landed in Oakland and of course there was quite a reception there for us. I mean a lot of photographers and media and what not. In fact, I ran into my brother-in-law there. I didn't even know he was in the service. He was in the Army Air Corps and he looked so handsome in his Army uniform. That was a very pleasant surprise. Then they gave dinners for us and Mrs. Nimitz. I have a picture of her with the three of us girls from southern California...and then Jeanette MacDonald came in and we were photographed with her. And they gave us corsages and presents and what not. It was quite an affair.

Did you as a result of years in captivity end up with any health problems? In fact, that's where I should ask you about your appendicitis thing.

There in Los Baños after Dr. Nance had joined the group, I developed sort of a lump in my groin, which was assumed to be a hernia. So, the doctor made an incision. The morning of the surgery I was kind of nauseated but I thought "Well, I'm just anxious." So, once he made the incision, he discovered that it was a hydrocele, a very rare instance in females. Since he had my abdomen open, he decided to take out my appendix. Of course, the appendix was just about to burst much to his surprise.

When you got home did you have physical problems? Dental? I imagine prisoners suffered dental problems having been able to care of their teeth.

Well, they probably had that but we had a very thorough examination there in Oakland and we went on 90-day recuperative leave and then Eldene Paige and I decided we wanted to go to Bethesda to see the capital city. So, we drove across country in an old Hudson sedan. Of course, we ran into a lot of publicity there, too. At that point, I was assigned to the Treasury Department.

How did that happen?

I guess Sue Dauser, the Superintendent of the Nurse Corps, must have asked me and I thought well if that's what they want me to do then that's what I'll do. So, as the representative of the Navy Nurse Corps that was quite an honor. Then I went up to New York twice - once as Navy display showing the different things that the Japanese used and so on.

That was at the Waldorf.

No, no that was a different occasion.

So you went up to New York. The first was for the bond drive.

Oh, yes. I went on several bond drives and talked to the students in one of the schools. Of course, they couldn't relate to what I was saying. They were too young for that. Then I was with different women's organizations that invited me to be their guest and one thing or another. Then I went to New York on this display. Again, I was sent up to the Waldorf Astoria where they held the annual forum put on by the *New York Herald Tribune*. That was in 1945. In fact, a very fine

family invited me to come to their home up the Hudson River and I saw a television for the first time.

Oh, that was a nice surprise. So this was all within a year after you got back - '45 and '46.
Yes.

Then you said shortly thereafter in '46 or '47 you got married.

Well, before '45 was over, I asked to be transferred to Panama. Down there I was at the Rodman Navy Hospital on the Pacific side.

Where's Coco Solo in relation to that? Is that on the other side?

Yes. But the war was winding down and they closed that station. So, I went home and I got married that year...before the year was out '46...it was about June, I guess, when I came home from Panama.

June '46?

Yes. I was married on the way home. I brought a new car down there and it was flown to New Orleans.

You bought the car in Panama?

Yes.

Was it a brand spanking new model because they hadn't been making cars for a long time.

Yes. I know that's why I had decided to buy one down there while it was available. But, the man I married met me there in New Orleans. We were married on the way home.

And then you went back to California after that.

Well I think we've covered it. I want to ask you just a couple of more questions. You have three sons now and a daughter.

Yes.

And you have three grandsons?

Yes, in California and then two grandsons here and a granddaughter and they're all under 13 years of age.

(Questions from phone interview)

When you were in the prison...in all three prisons--you were in Santa Scholastica and then Santo Tomas and then Los Baños. I asked about whether you had gotten sick and you mentioned the fact that you had to have that surgery at one point. Did you ever get anything like beri-beri?

Oh, yes. Everyone got it. I think most of the nurses just got the dry type.

The dry beri-beri.

Yes. Of course, there were many of them that had that of type beri-beri and were all swollen up with their puffy faces. Their legs looked like logs. They would lie down feel like the water was coming up to the upper parts of their body at least that's what I recall them saying.

And you had to dry beri beri where your feet ache.

Oh, yeah. You ache all over and your knees buckled and your joints ached. It's just a very uncomfortable condition.

And there was nothing you really could do for it because you were malnourished.

Right.

Did you have that in all three camps or just the last one?

Just in Los Baños. Of course, this is something that started with POWs right to begin with. They were put on a very watery lugao diet to begin with. So, I expect they experienced it a lot sooner than we did. Then at Santo Tomas they had the shortage on food much sooner than we. So, it wasn't really until the last 5 months that we really begin to get the real effects.

When you were rescued did you still have it?

Oh, yes. Yes. It's amazing how fast you recover. When we were rescued, they were using the new Bilibid Prison there in Muntinlupa to house us...to take care of us when they rescued us. And oh the food they passed out! And it was amazing how quickly we could recover from this.

Within a day or so?

Oh no. Not that fast. Of course, at first when eat this food it's much too rich and much too salty and people got sick eating too much. But it took a while but still it was remarkable that people can recover so well.

Did you have any other diseases besides beri-beri?

No, I didn't. I think Margaret Nash developed tuberculosis but I don't think that was discovered until she got back. I don't know I think Goldie was surveyed out on a medical survey.

When we were having our fish dinner, you told me what it was like when you got back and how you hadn't really gotten any type of counseling. They had taken care of your physical needs but you hadn't gotten any debriefings or anything the way they do now with POWs. You were just kind of left on your own. So you recall you didn't get any type of counseling at all. You were just brought back into the mainstream without any real preparation for that and that's when you attribute that you were having those spells of crying.

Well, I think they thought I was sort of making believe, trying to get a medical survey. Of course, that hurt worse than ever.

Now the fact you weren't faking anything and they were giving you the impression that you were faking it?

Yes. I probably would not have even bothered but I had married my husband by then and he kept telling me "Don't let them just throw you out. Everybody else is getting out on a medical discharge." Had he not pushed me so I would have just let it go at that. I probably would have been better off.

You felt you would have been better off not pursuing it any further. But none of the other people - your other colleagues - got any kind of counseling to help you readjust.

Not that I know of.

You don't remember anything like that.

The other question is promotions. Now when you were there in Cañacao in '40 and '41, you didn't have any rank as you said you were addressed as Miss Such and Such...Miss Still and Miss Nash because nurses didn't have rank. You were rescued and you came back to civilization again and you suddenly realized that you had rank. Do you remember that?

Yes. When we were in Leyte, one of the paymasters there was trying to figure out our back pay, especially for Laura Cobb because she had seniority raises along the line. But they were whistling "Whoo, whoo. Look at that back pay they're going to get." But at that point we were just ensigns for the purposes of the moment.

Just to give you some kind of pay.

That's right.

So even Laura Cobb was an ensign at that point.

Well, I'm not sure about that.

But you all were.

Everybody else was.

Do you recall when you realized you were no longer an ensign.

Yes. When we were in Oakland and we were on a 90-day, they gave us a physical at the Oakland Naval Hospital there. I think at that point we were made a JG. Then by the time I got to Bethesda, I was lieutenant. Then I went down to Panama and was there for six months until Canal Zone Rodman Hospital was decommissioned and by that time I was a lieutenant commander.

And that was in '46?

Yes.

O.K. So when you got out you were LCDR then.

Yes.

When you were all interned at the very beginning in Santa Scholastica, you told me about the hospital there whatever it was. Was it a machine shop or something?

Oh, no that's Santo Tomas.

O.K. Do you recall what kind of equipment you had in the Santa Scholastica camp whether you had the kinds of instruments you needed to do work in the hospital.

The Army had taken it over. It was a satellite hospital to begin with.

It was a satellite of Sternberg?

Yes. Well, maybe I'm saying it wrong, but eventually, I was telling you they planned these surgical teams – Army-Navy surgical teams.

Yes, and you were planted all over the place you told me.

This one at Santa Scholastic was one of those and the Army had really equipped it quite well. So, when the Army moved out and the Navy moved in. I think I told you that they had moved the hospital to Balintawak, north of Manila. They had evidently moved a lot of Navy equipment over there. So, that was brought down to Santa Scholastica. So, the hospital was very well equipped.

You had sterilizers and all that type of thing?

Well, of course sterilizers are hard to put into a hospital like that but I presume they did.

Did you have that kind of equipment at Santo Tomas?

Do you remember any of that equipment that you may have had there? Did you have instruments?

I'm not too sure of that because most of the patients who needed surgical treatment were taken outside hospitals.

I see. So for any real important things you had to go outside.

They did surgeries and complicated cases and about the only thing we had in there were patients who dehydrated, diarrhea, or dysentery.

What about Los Baños with surgical equipment and that sort of thing. Was it better equipped?

No not really, not until Dr. Nance came. When we first started, Dr. Leech and Dr. Whitman were in charge of the hospital and they were sending anybody needing treatment back to Manila. But things changed and Dr. Nance came. So they had more doctors than they needed. He volunteered to come here and he brought with him all of his surgical equipment. So thereafter he didn't bother to send patients back. He just did the surgeries there.

O.K. So he had enough to work with?

Yes. I have a map of Bilibid, Santo Tomas and I have a real large map of Santa Scholastica and then I have a map of Los Baños.